Peg o' the Ring

by

Emilie Benson Knipe
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"So Bee and Cousin John were married"

PEG O' THE RING

A Maid of Denewood

BY
EMILIE BENSON KNIPE
AND
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ILLUSTRATIONS BY
C. M. RELYEA

NEW YORK
THE CENTURY CO.
1922

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Published, September, 1915

Printed in U. S. A.

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CHAPTER I

A LETTER FROM MT. VERNON

"THEN they 'll b-be m-m-m-married at Denewood after all," I stuttered in my excitement, breaking in upon Mrs. Mummer as she finished Bee's letter.

"Aye, that they will, praise be!" she replied heartily, and then read again the news that had gladdened our hearts.

It has been thought best not to have the wedding at Mt. Vernon on account of a death in the family; but Lady Washington will keep me in countenance at Denewood. His Excellency plans to be in Philadelphia in a fortnight and the wedding must take place almost at once.

Mrs. Mummer bounced out of her chair, all a-bustle.

"In a fortnight!" she exclaimed. "'T is well I 'took time by the forelock,' as Mummer says,

and began making ready against their coming." She was across the room, hurrying toward the kitchens ere she finished speaking.

"It 's g-g-good I 'm here to h-h-help you," I cried, skipping along behind her; but in my eagerness I bumped into her, for she had stopped abruptly, struck by a new thought.

"And what of her plenishings, child?" she asked in dismay, looking at me, as if I could answer such a riddle.

"C-c-can't she g-g-get her d-dresses at M-M-Mt. Vernon?" I suggested, but Mrs. Mummer shook her head emphatically.

"Nay, there are no shops there to supply her fittingly, and, what 's more, her outfit will be the last thing Miss Bee will be thinking of."

"T-then we m-m-must e'en d-do it f-f-for her," I declared. "We c-could n't have Bee w-w-wedded in d-dimity."

"That we could n't, Peggy dear," Mrs. Mummer agreed. "I would n't have her dressed in aught but what was most elegant, and what does an old housekeeper like me know of fashions?"

This was true enough, for although Mrs. Mummer was full of needle wisdom, she had no

knowledge of the latest modes, and I was but a child of nine years, who could be of little help.

"Beside," Mrs. Mummer went on, "with all that must be done, 'twixt now and their coming, I shall have few moments to spare on mantua-makers. Yet she must have her plenishings."

"I h-h-have it," I cried, an idea popping into my head. "W-w-we'll send for P-Polly and B-B-Betty. They kn-kn-know naught e-else b-but what is f-f-fashionable."

Mrs. Mummer clapped her hands at this suggestion.

"The very thing!" she exclaimed. "As Mummer says, 'All creatures have their use in this world;' though I never thought to seek help of those two girls," and without more words she went to the great desk in the library.

Laboriously, with her quill grasped in a hand that was little accustomed to it, Mrs. Mummer wrote a note to my sisters, summoning them from our home in Haddonfield. That done, she hung up her pen and despatched the letter immediately by Charley with instructions to waste no time upon the road.

"And now to work!" she cried, as we watched

the black boy disappear on the gallop; "there are a thousand things to be set to rights and I scarce know where to begin."

"T-there 's the w-w-wedding c-c-cake," I suggested wisely.

"Aye, I must get at that soon, and it shall be such a cake as was ne'er seen in Germantown," declared Mrs. Mummer.

"And I 'll h-h-help seed the r-r-raisins!" I exclaimed, dancing about ready to begin on the instant.

"Nay, dearie," Mrs. Mummer returned quite seriously, "no hand but mine shall touch that cake or aught that goes into it."

Though I protested somewhat at this decision of Mrs. Mummer's, she had made up her mind and held to it, so that until the great day I never saw the wedding cake. Nevertheless I had my fill of seeding raisins; for there were vast quantities of different cakes and sugared cookies baked, and I had my tasks as well as every other maid and man in the house.

Inside and out, Denewood hummed with busy workers; but the kitchens were, of course, the scene of the greatest activity; for not only would

there be a vast company at the wedding itself but the neighbors for miles around would expect their share of the feast. It was not many days before all the cupboards were filled with pasties, fruit-pies, and dozens of other good things that would take no hurt for a little waiting.

Polly and Betty came at once, all a-twitter over a wedding in the family, and monstrous set up at having so important a part in the preparations.

Mrs. Mummer had already engaged the most famous mantua-maker in Philadelphia to attend to the dressmaking, and this woman had sent word that, as luck would have it, the fall ships were newly arrived from Europe with cargoes of fine goods, and that we should make our purchases at once. The housekeeper grudged the time she must lose at Denewood; but it was too good an opportunity to be missed, so the day after my sisters came, we started betimes in the great family chariot, seeing that the chaise would scarce hold the boxes and bundles we should bring back with us.

Mrs. Mummer had another errand to do in the city of which she made something of a mystery; but when I saw her slyly disappear into the shop

of Mr. Twining, the silversmith, I guessed that her business was to buy the thimble and ring for the wedding-cake. But I said naught of my idea to Betty or Polly, who seemed vastly curious, although they thought it beneath their dignity to show it.

It was a most exciting day to me, and never did I know before that there could be so many different kinds of brocades, satins, laces, fine muslins, and chintzes as I saw then. Huge boxes and bales of dry goods were piled up on the pavements before the wholesale stores, situate on Front Street between Arch and Walnut, and from whose very doors one could ofttimes catch glimpses of the great ships which had brought these cargoes overseas. Clerks and apprentices were busy with sharp knives and claw-hammers ripping open the cases and carrying the stuffs indoors to be displayed to the admiration of the eager retailers. Everywhere men and women were haggling over prices, some talking loudly and saying that the goods were naught but shoddy, though after long wrangling they bought, a fact that puzzled me mightily.

"B-Betty," I whispered, pulling at my sister's

cloak, "if the w-w-woman l-likes it n-not, w-w-why does she p-pay eleven g-good g-guineas for it?"

"Hush, child, don't be a nizzy," she answered; "'t is all in the way of business. 'T would never do to buy without cheapening a little."

At this bargaining Mrs. Mummer was as good as the best, and I noted that in the end she mostly had her way; but she bought without stint, and when at last we were ready to return to Denewood there was scarce room in the coach. Indeed, so full was it of bundles that when the steps were folded up there was not one of us but had something in her lap as well as under foot.

I was a little disappointed when Mrs. Mummer decided that Bee should wear naught more gorgeous than white at her wedding. I would have had her clad in yellow satin with an overskirt of blue mantua or, belike, purple velvet, for at that age I had a gay taste in colors; but Mrs. Mummer chose a petticoat of white satin veiled with silver tissue worked with silver flowers, and an overdress of silver brocade; and, though I murmured somewhat, when I saw the high-heeled brocade slippers (for which she said she had dia-

mond buckles in the Denewood strong-box), I felt quite reconciled and could not but admit it would be most elegant and fashionable.

For the bridesmaids, Betty and Polly had their choice, and they selected a peach color and white changeable mantua with lace, that would be becoming to all. This entirely satisfied me, for heretofore I had worn but the simplest of muslins so that I was quite set up at the thought of Mistress Margaret Travers in such elegancies.

We would all have been ready to lie late the next morning, but this in no wise suited Mrs. Mummer, who routed us out ere the sun had fairly risen.

"Up! Up!" she cried, coming into each of our rooms in turn. "Up! Up! I 'll have no slug-a-beds in this house. The time is all too short for what we have to do." And so began another busy day with no rest nor shirking till all was accomplished.

As the fortnight drew to a close I was impatient for the hour to come when I should see my darling Bee again. She, too, was a Travers, but of the English branch of the family, and had arrived in America just at the beginning of our

war with the Mother Country five years before. She had come a stranger to a strange land, but had soon won all hearts by her courage and loyalty to the home of her adoption; while to me, who was scarce more than a babe when first we met at Denewood, she was all the world.

When Mrs. Mummer, returning alone from Virginia, brought word that Cousin John Travers was to marry with Beatrice, I was at first much surprised. Soon, however, I came to see that this was the nicest thing that could have happened and felt certain that a lucky sixpence Bee had brought with her from England had played its part in bringing it about.

No wonder that I could not sit still on the morning of their coming. Bill Schmuck, Cousin John's body-servant, had arrived the evening before with a message that the party would stay the night in Philadelphia, where Mr. Chew's house had been put at their disposal, but would reach Germantown early the following day.

And at last they came. A big chariot with four horses led the way, General Washington upon the one hand and Cousin John upon the other, while behind them were Major McLane,

my brother Bart, Mark Powell, and many of his Excellency's train whom I knew not. It was a gay cavalcade, but I saw naught save the great coach, and was dancing before the door ere the steps were let down.

"Bee! Bee!" I cried, and in a moment she was out and had me in her arms, hugging me tight.

"My own little Peg," she whispered, kissing me; and I could only repeat, "Bee! Bee! Bee!" again and again, while I fair sobbed with excitement.

After that Bee went to greet Mrs. Mummer and to say a word to the servants and black boys who stood about grinning with delight to see her back again, while Cousin John picked me up and kissed me.

"Y-you d-d-don't l-look as if y-you 'd b-b-been losted," I told him. At which every one laughed, but in truth he looked happier than I had ever seen him.

"Nay, 'tis we who worried about him who are but shadows," cried Allen McLane, "and we get no sympathy for it," he added, as he brought his great bulk down from his horse.

I wriggled in Cousin John's arms, wishing to

go to Major McLane, who was a particular friend of mine, but Cousin John, setting me on the ground, still held my hand.

"You must welcome his Excellency and Lady Washington," he said, for in my excitement I had clean forgot our distinguished visitors.

Holding wide my petticoat I made my deepest curtsey to the General, and he in his turn bowed low to me as he might have to a great lady, for indeed he was the most elegant of gentlemen. But when I turned to salute Madam Washington, who, though scarce taller than I, stood very dignified and straight, she came quickly to me.

"Nay, child, this would be more suitable than a formal scrape," and with that she kissed me on both cheeks. I vow it was easy to understand how the first lady in the land had won all hearts, but I was too surprised even to stutter a reply.

Then I was free to greet my old friends, and Allen McLane set me on his shoulder and carried me into the house behind the others.

Oh, how good it was to have Bee and Cousin John back and Denewood full of people again, as in the old days before the war had come so close to us. And what a gay table it was when we all

sat for dinner; Bee, at its head, in spite of her protests that Cousin John should have that honor.

"Nay, Bee," he insisted; " 't is you saved Denewood and it is yours."

And so with his Excellency on her right hand and me on her left, Beatrice Travers once more played hostess to the guests of Denewood.

But though I longed to have her to myself for a minute and could scarce wait for all the questions I had to ask her, it was not till night that Bee and I were alone together. She slipped into my bed, which had been set up for the time being in the day-nursery next her room.

" Oh, Peggy dear, it wasn't so after all!" she whispered, referring to the past, when all save she and I had believed Cousin John dead. For answer I kissed her and snuggled into her arms.

"T-t-tell me all a-about it, Bee," I murmured, and straightway she recounted the adventures that had befallen her since she had left Denewood many weeks before.

CHAPTER II

LADY WASHINGTON TAKES COMMAND

DIRECTLY after breakfast next morning the men went away in attendance upon General Washington, and we stood for a moment in the portico to watch them.

"'T-t-t is well they're g-g-gone," I said gravely, to Madam Washington. "W-w-we w-women have our h-h-hands full w-w-without them." Why she and Bee laughed so immoderate at this I could not fathom, for to my mind it was no jest. The tasks still before us seemed innumerable when one remembered that on the following day "at candlelight," as the invitations read, the wedding would take place.

First of all Bee's plenishings must be inspected. She gladdened Mrs. Mummer's heart by the surprise and delight she showed in all her finery, insisting that the old housekeeper was too good to her.

"Nay, Miss Bee, there 's naught this house af-

fords could be too good," Mrs. Mummer replied, and meant every word of it.

When the wedding-dress was tried on, and I saw how beautiful Bee looked in it, I was reconciled to the choice of white. Madam Washington, too, was most complimentary, declaring the taste was perfect.

"Indeed, my dear, I could n't fail to admire," she said to Bee, "seeing that 't is most similar to the choice I made for my own wedding."

Bee thanked Polly and Betty for their share in the work, vowing she could think of naught that would be an improvement, which pleased my sisters mightily; and indeed even the fit of the gown was well nigh perfect and, save for a seam or two which could be run up in a minute, the bridal outfit was complete from lace veil to brocade slippers. But it was not quite finished that day, for Mrs. Mummer saw to it that there should be a few stitches to set on the morrow as 't is well known that ill luck follows if the wedding-gown is completed ere the wedding day.

There had been talk of having the ceremony at Christ Church in Philadelphia; but, rather than take the long ride to the city, it was finally de-

cided that they should wed at Denewood, which was large enough to accommodate all the invited guests. It was a question, however, just where the bridal party should stand during the service.

Polly and Betty had spoke for the dining-room with the great bow-window at one end as the most fitting place, and Mrs. Mummer too was inclined to such an arrangement, but there were objections to this, and the drawing-room being thought too small, no decision so far had been reached.

When the subject was broached anew, Madam Washington made short work of the matter. She marshaled us all into the great hall and pointed to the first stair-landing which was but a step or two up.

"The parson shall stand there," she declared. "We will place some growing plants, or if we can do no better at this time of the year, a bank of green boughs on either side. 'T will make a most tasteful bower."

"Aye, that 's true enough," agreed Mrs. Mummer, though she still shook her head dubiously.

"In that way," continued Lady Washington, "we shall gain the upper gallery for guests as well

as the hall itself, and thus we can accommodate more than in the drawing-room and still have the dining-room free."

"But, Lady Washington, ma'am," said Mrs. Mummer anxiously, "if so be we have guests in the gallery, how will Miss Bee ever win down the stair without crushing her finery?"

"She must not come down those stairs," Lady Washington asserted with decision. "I like not to look at a woman as she bobs from step to step, and in the face of so great a company it would be most awkwardish. Nay, she shall seek her maids in the dining-room by way of the back stairs. I 've seen such before lined with clean sheets to save the bride's ruffles."

"Now that 's well thought of," exclaimed Mrs. Mummer, and then, with a little toss of her head, "but, begging your Ladyship's pardon, there will be no need of sheets. My back stairs are as white as my front."

"Aye, that I 'm well assured of, Mrs. Mummer," came the quick reply. "You 're too notable a housewife to make so slovenly an expedient necessary."

It was so quickly and gracefully done that Mrs. Mummer glowed at the compliment.

"I thank your Ladyship," she murmured, "and I 'm sure the arrangements you have suggested will be perfect."

"Yes, 't is the best plan, I 'm certain," Madam Washington went on, with a nod and a smile to us all. "Once in the dining-room the great doors may be set wide, the bridesmaids will enter the hall in front, and last the bride herself, with eyes as they should be, modestly cast down, leaning upon his Excellency's arm." For General Washington was to stand in place of a father to Bee, she having no near relatives outside of England and her own father being dead since she was a baby.

So it was agreed, and when that evening we spoke of the arrangements to General Washington, telling him how his lady had solved our difficulties, he chuckled thoughtfully to himself.

"Eh, now, 't is her Ladyship who should have been the General," he declared, with pride. " 'T is a most suitable arrangement. I like well the strategy of taking the guests upon the flank,

rather than braving their fire from the front. What say you, Mistress Beatrice?"

Bee laughingly assented, but truth to tell she assented to everything and would have said, "Aye," had they wished her to wed in the kitchen.

There was no doubt Bee was happy. 'T was plain to all who saw her, but now and then I caught a wistful look in her face as if perchance she longed for something she could in no wise attain.

I taxed her with it that night as she sat on the edge of my bed.

"Nay, now, Peggy," she protested, " 't is your imagination. I 'm the happiest girl in America. Sure, no others see aught else in my face."

"T-there 's n-no one l-l-loves you as I d-d-do, Bee," I answered. "I think 't was m-my h-h-heart t-t-told me."

At that she took me in her arms and held me close.

" 'T is not that I 'm sad, Peg, dear," she began, "but—but I can't help thinking now and then of Granny, and of Horace and Hal, my brothers, far away in England. They don't even know yet that I am to be married and—and a maid

can't help wishing that one of her own family was by upon her wedding-day."

I had no words to comfort her. Indeed I scarce understood, seeing that her brothers could not love her better than we at Denewood; but, to show my sympathy, I nestled close to her and so we stayed a moment or two in silence.

Then I said, a little hurt, perhaps:

"Is n't a c-c-cousin a *p-p-piece* of the f-f-family, Bee?" at which she gave a low laugh.

"Your old Bee is an ungrateful girl," she cried. "I feel ashamed to be wishing for the impossible when I have so much. Let us speak no more of it," and a little later, with a good-night kiss, she left me.

CHAPTER III

BEE'S WEDDING CAKE

I AWOKE next morning to find Mrs. Mummer standing at my bedside, looking down at me with a smile upon her face.

"Is the d-d-day f-f-fair?" I asked anxiously, for it had looked cloudy the night before.

"Aye," she answered contentedly. "'T is fair, and 'happy is the bride the sun shines on,' as Mummer says."

But I wanted to see for myself, so, jumping up, I pattered to the window in my night-rail to look out. The sky was blue, with scarce a cloud in it, and it was so warm and sunny that it seemed like a day in June rather than early December.

"'T is f-f-fine enough even for Bee's w-w-wedding," I stuttered, with a sigh of satisfaction.

"'T is none the less possible to catch cold, walking the floors in bare feet." 'T was Bee who spoke, and we turned to see her standing in the doorway, dressed in her striped Persian

morning gown, kenting handkerchief and apron, just as if she were not to be wedded that very afternoon.

"Oh, Miss Bee!" exclaimed Mrs. Mummer in dismay, "did I not tell you to lie abed till you were called?"

"Aye," laughed Bee, running across the room and throwing her arms about the old housekeeper, "but did I say I would do it?"

"Nay, do not blandish me," retorted Mrs. Mummer, half turning away. "'T is a good scolding you deserve."

"'T is Peg should be scolded," answered Bee, looking down at me with pretended severity. "Not even a moccasin upon her feet." Then turning to Mrs. Mummer, "And you smiling at her. Think you I want a bridesmaiden with a red nose?"

"Nay, Bee," I answered, in all seriousness, "t-there 's s-s-small d-danger of t-t-that, s-seeing that m-m-my n-nose never r-r-reddens for at l-least two d-d-days when I have the s-s-s-snuffles." Notwithstanding I hurried to clothe myself.

"Make yourself fine," said Bee, watching me.

"Have I told you of the girls at Mt. Vernon who ventured to the dinner-table with their hair in curl-papers? In the midst of the meal we heard a party of French officers arriving, and they would have run in haste; but Lady Washington bade them stay, 'What is good enough for his Excellency is good enough for any one,' she said."

"And she never spoke a truer word," declared Mrs. Mummer with heat, "though 't is in my mind you but told the tale to wean me from the subject of your resting."

There was a laugh at this, but Mrs. Mummer was not to be put off and still insisted that Bee keep to her room.

"But, please," Bee pleaded, "there are a thousand things to be done. I want to take Lady Washington her chocolate, I want to arrange the flowers, I want—"

"Then 'want must be your master,' as Mummer says," Mrs. Mummer interrupted. "Nay, dearie," she went on, her voice dropping to an imploring tone, "attend upon Madam Washington with her chocolate, if so be your mind is set on it, but leave the flowers to Miss Betty and

Miss Polly. Sure they have a pretty taste in such matters and for the rest, trust your old servant, Elizabeth Mummer. 'T would break my heart to see you a jaded bride and that 's what you 'll be if I let you do all the work of Denewood this morn."

Most of the day I was busy, scurrying here and there upon errands for Mrs. Mummer, and was but half aware of the many arrivals at Denewood. All the wedding-party was on hand, that I knew, and the Rev. William White of Christ Church, who was to read the service; for the rest I had little concern, though once or twice I remember running into Major McLane, who would have stopped me, vowing I was forgetting old friendships.

It must have been nigh time for me to be putting on my own finery when Mrs. Mummer sent me off with a message for the head gardener.

" 'T is the last of your duties this day, Peggy dear," she said, patting my shoulder lovingly; "indeed I know not how I should have fared had you not been here to help me," and with that praise in my ears I sped quickly to do her bidding.

On my way back I was tempted by a glint of red in the wood bordering the roadway, and thinking that some bright leaves might add to the show of flowers, which were none too plentiful at that season, I hurried to investigate. I was disappointed with what I found, for though at a distance they seemed fresh enough, a closer inspection showed them rusty and withered. I was about to go back to the house, which was hidden by the trees and might have been a mile away for all one could see, when a hail from the road turned me sharp about. And there, drawn up, was a cart half filled with boxes. The driver held the reins listlessly as a tired man will, looking disconsolately at his jaded horse, while between us stood a young man fashionably dressed, albeit very dusty.

"Can you tell me if there is a place called Denewood near?" he asked, politely enough.

"W-w-why, i-it 's r-r-right h-h-here," I answered, stuttering more than was my wont because I addressed a stranger.

"Right here!" he exclaimed joyfully. "Now indeed that is good news. I thought I 'd never come at it." Then for an instant he looked at

me quizzically. "On my life I believe 't is Peggy!" he burst out finally.

Now to be greeted with such a lack of ceremony by a dusty youth off the road did not suit my taste, and I made as if to leave him.

"Hold on," he cried, vaulting the wall and stepping before me; "you are Peg, are n't you?"

"I w-w-waste no w-w-words on s-s-saucy c-c-c-chance-m-met s-s-strangers," I declared, with my nose in the air in imitation of Bee's haughtiest manner.

"Your pardon," he murmured, giving me the compliment of his hat, which was vastly soothing to my dignity. "I 'm Hal Travers, Bee's brother, just arrived out of England. Has n't she told you of me? She never tired talking of you."

"You Hal Travers?" I nigh shouted in my delight and surprise. "Oh! I 'm s-s-so g-glad. You 're just in t-time for the w-w-wedding!"

"The wedding!" he exclaimed, surprised in his turn. "Whose wedding?"

"W-w-why Bee's, of c-c-course," I explained. "She w-w-will be m-m-married at c-c-candlelight, and y-y-you m-m-must h-h-hurry."

"Hold on," he remonstrated, glum on the in-

stant. "I like not this sudden news of Bee's marriage. She 's a great heiress since her cousin John Travers died and left her his estate."

"B-b-but he is n't d-d-dead," I told him. " 'T is John Travers s-she is to w-w-wed. Now w-w-will you h-h-h-hurry?"

Hal was for hearing more of the wedding and was eager with a hundred questions, but I knew there was no time to be lost and begged him to curb his curiosity. Already a plan to surprise Bee had formed in my mind.

"Have y-you a w-w-w-wedding s-suit?" I asked anxiously.

"Nay, I never so named it," he answered, with a glance at the boxes in the cart, "but I have a plum-colored velvet of the latest cut that might serve, if the affair is not too fashionable."

" 'T will e'en h-have to d-d-do," I told him, "t-though the w-w-wedding *is* m-m-monstrous fashionable." Then having instructed the carter how to find the entrance a hundred yards or so down the road, and to drive to the stables at once, I led Hal through the trees to the back of the house.

He followed me obediently, ready to enter into

my plans, and I was sure I was going to like him for his own sake as well as Bee's.

I sent at once for Bart, who came promptly, dressed in his parade uniform and jangling his sword as he hurried. He looked so handsome in his blue and buff that I was very proud as I introduced them.

"This is Bee's brother Hal, just out of England," I explained, but I was not in the least prepared for Bart's cold salutation and the stiff little bow he gave.

" 'T is scarce a good year for Britishers," he growled, and I looked for a resentful answer from Hal, but was agreeably surprised.

"Sure 't is a bad policy not to welcome a Britisher who thinks the Colonies have the right of it in their fight with the King," he said easily, hitting on the instant the cause of Bart's ungraciousness.

"If that 's how the matter stands, you 're thrice welcome!" cried Bart, holding out a hand to him.

" 'T is an explanation I 've had to make many times since I ventured out of New York," Hal laughed; "which seemed strange to me, seeing that ere I left London it was out of style to side

with the Ministry against the Colonies. And after this battle of Yorktown I 'll wager Charles Fox looks to it that no more troops are sent against you."

"Now that 's right good news," exclaimed Bart cordially, "but, I warn you, we like not the word Colonies here."

"To be sure," Hal replied, apologetically; "I was forgetting. You are the independent States of America now."

"Aye, now and henceforth," declared Bart solemnly.

How long those two boys might have talked their politics I don't know, but I soon showed them there were more important matters to be considered.

The cart had arrived by this time with Hal's boxes, among which I noted a huge packing case, which seemed strange luggage for a dandy, but I was too busy explaining my plans to give much thought to it. Bart was to take Hal to his room to dress, after which we were to meet near the dining-room door, just a few minutes before the ceremony. This being understood, I ran off to

make ready, scarce able to contain myself, so excited was I at the prospect before me.

Mrs. Mummer was too busy with Bee's appareling to note how long I had been upon her errand, and, moreover, Clarinda was to help me, so my absence had gone unremarked.

As it happened, I was almost late, for the music had begun as I ran down the stair to meet Hal at the place appointed. He was there, waiting unnoticed among so many strangers, though in truth he looked elegant enough in his plum-colored velvet to have attracted attention at any other time.

I took his hand and led him to the dining-room where the bridal party was already assembled. As I opened the door I heard Bee's voice.

"Where is Peg?" she asked. "We can't start without her."

By this I was in the room and, still holding Hal's hand, I went directly to her; but it was the first time I had seen her fully dressed for her wedding and she looked so beautiful in her white veil that I forgot everything else and stood dumb, staring at her, and she in turn, astounded at the

sight of her brother, could make no sound; while the others, seeing that something unforeseen had happened, ceased to talk and so, for a space, there was silence in the room. Then I found my tongue.

"'T-t-t is the w-w-wedding g-gift you w-w-wanted, Bee," I whispered, and at that every one began to talk again, but I had eyes only for the bride.

"Hal!" she cried, taking a step toward him; "is it really you?"

"Aye," he answered, "and Granny sends her love to you, as does Horrie."

"And they 're well?" asked Bee, a little anxiously.

"Never better," he answered.

"I 'm *so* glad you 're here," she murmured, "I 've naught left to wish for!" And with a nod and a happy smile at me, she stepped back to his Excellency's side, for it was high time we were starting and further greetings had to wait.

"Now, Peggy," some one said, putting a basket of flowers in my hand and setting me in front. Then the doors were opened and, 'mid a burst of music, I led the bridal party out of the room.

There was, however, another surprise in store for the bride. As we looked into the great hall, there, hanging on the wall above the turn of the stair, was a portrait of Bee, so like her that it seemed as if she were walking to meet herself. This was a picture painted by Sir Joshua Reynolds when Bee was in England, and it had been in the huge case I had noted among Hal's boxes. He had spoken of it to Bart, who forthwith had it unpacked and hung, to every one's delight. Had Hal planned to win a welcome from Cousin John he could not have hit upon a better scheme, and he told us afterward he had been at some trouble to get the canvas into the country by way of Holland, and indeed, had only succeeded through the help of an uncle, a Mr. Van der Helst.

So Bee and Cousin John were married, but memory plays us queer tricks, and from the time I entered the hall until we were seated at dinner listening to toasts to the bride and groom, all is vague.

I can still bring back Cousin John, who faced us as we entered, with eyes for none but Bee, and beside him Allen McLane, standing stiff and straight as if on parade; but of the brilliant as-

semblage of gaily dressed ladies and gentlemen I have small recollection.

Perhaps some will find a reason for my remembering so little of the wedding itself in that I was but a very young child, though I thought myself quite grown up. The truth is, once the service was over, my whole mind centered on the cutting of the cake, and that operation is still fresh in my memory after all these years.

The great confection was set at the top of the table reserved for the bridal party, and never before or since did I see so monstrous a cake. Mrs. Mummer had kept her word. None such had ever been baked in Germantown.

I could scarce eat for keeping my eyes upon it, while I wondered where lay the ring, the thimble, and the silver piece, and who would get them. At length, after what seemed like hours of waiting, my patience gave out.

"Oh, Bee," I sighed, "m-m-must m-m-more h-h-healths be d-drunk? S-s-sure I 'd think you and Cousin John w-w-would be the h-h-healthiest p-p-people in the world a-a-already."

"What is it you want, dear?" Bee asked, smiling and leaning toward me.

"Is n't it m-m-m-most time t-to c-c-cut the c-c-cake?" I implored, and as if I had given a signal, every one at the table seemed to cry, "Cut the cake!"

But before it could be done Mrs. Mummer had to be called to point out the portion that had been reserved for the bridal party and in which the talismans were placed. She came in, looking very important, albeit a little flustered at the compliments paid her cookery, and having shown Bee where to cut, she stepped back to watch, remarking with satisfaction,

"There 's not a maid in miles but will dream of her true love to-night on a bit of that cake passed through the wedding-ring."

Bee picked up the huge knife used to carve out great barons of beef, but ere she set to work Allen McLane stopped her.

"Nay," he cried, making a long arm and plucking Cousin John's sword from its scabbard, "this is the knife for a soldier's wife," and he brought it to her.

Bee took it with a smile of thanks, held it aloft a moment, and then made the first cut.

Polly and Betty my sisters, Sally Wister,

Fanny Morris and Mary Rawle, the other bridesmaidens, were served first, and when my turn came I saw that Bee skipped a slice; but I scarce heeded that fact then, for, with a sinking heart, I heard Sally say she had bit on something hard.

Alas for Sally! It was the thimble she had found, dooming her to spinsterhood; and my spirits rose, for 't was the opposite of that I wished for.

Then Mary Rawle held up a silver thrippenny bit, foretelling riches for her; and still I hoped.

But just as I was about to bite into my own slice, Betty, mantling prettily, showed the golden ring. I felt myself nigh to tears, for 't was that I had longed for; and I put my portion down untasted, sore disappointed.

"Look in your slice, Peg," whispered Bee. "I 'm sure I felt something as the sword cut through."

"Nay," said Mrs. Mummer, " 't is impossible. There 's naught else in it save good plums."

But, made hopeful by Bee's words, and so scarce heeding Mrs. Mummer, I picked up my cake and bit into it, my teeth meeting at once on metal.

In a moment I had it in my hand and was stuttering violently in my excitement.

"Oh, Bee!" I cried. "I 've g-g-got the r-r-ring! I 've g-g-got the r-r-ring!"

"Nonsense, child, how could that be, when Betty has it?" asked Polly.

"H-hers c-can't be the r-r-right one," I maintained stoutly, holding up a massive jeweled circle on my outspread pink palm.

"Now, however came that in the cake?" cried Mrs. Mummer, eying it suspiciously, and her astonished exclamation brought all the company about my chair.

"Did you not put it in, Mrs. Mummer?" inquired Cousin John.

"Nay, Master John," she asserted, "I ne'er laid eyes on it before, and, what's more, no hand but mine touched aught that went into the dough."

"Ho, ho!" laughed Cousin John, "here 's a fine mystery. How came that ring into the cake?"

"And what meaning hath it for the child?" asked Mrs. Mummer, with a worried shake of her head; but there was no answer to either question.

CHAPTER IV

GREAT CHIEF! GREAT SQUAW!

THE curious ring I had found formed the chief topic of conversation for some time after its discovery. No one could doubt Mrs. Mummer, who vowed again and again that she herself had prepared all that went into her wonderful cake, reminding me of the fact that she had even refused my offer to seed the raisins.

"'T is nigh witchcraft," she declared. "Except that I had seen it with my own eyes I could never have believed it possible."

Nor did an examination of the ring itself bring the mystery any nearer solution. Rather was it deepened, for 't was no common ornament such as might be come by at any goldsmith's shop. A number of costly jewels were set into the wrought gold, all cut in an odd fashion which proclaimed their antiquity.

"'T is no ordinary ring," said his Excellency,

General Washington, mounting great horn-rimmed spectacles, through which he examined it, "and I should say that he who had it last lacked a good conscience, since he parted with it at all."

He handed it to Lady Washington, who, with her head on one side, regarded it curiously.

"La, child," she laughed, handing it back to me, "if the device upon the seal has any worth, 't would take no great prophet to foretell what will come of it."

"Is it not a savage?" I questioned, gazing at the cutting in the stone on the top of the circle.

"Mayhap some have called him that," she answered gaily, and I made my curtsey, puzzling over her words.

I liked the sensation the ring was creating and, childlike, felt very important over all the notice being taken of it; but it was too large to fit the thickest of my slim fingers, and not to be able to wear it would be a sore trial. Bee, however, brought back my smiles by winding yards of linen thread about the under side, and though two of the stones were covered, there was no longer danger of its slipping off. No doubt there was many a smile at so huge a ring on so small a

hand, but I cared naught for that, being assured that it looked most elegant and fashionable.

Following the usual custom, Denewood was filled to overflowing for the next two weeks with visitors come to pay their respects to the bride and groom and drink a dish of tea. Indeed, there was scarce an hour in the day that Bee was not receiving compliments from the ladies upstairs, while Cousin John entertained the gentlemen in the library below.

Nor were all the dainties served to those who came in chariots. The back of the house was as full of visitors as the front. From miles about the country, when the news of the good cheer at Denewood was noised abroad, the people came to be fed and to drink a health to the master and his lady.

Now it so happened that a small band of Indians were occupying the shed built for them along the west wall of the State House in Philadelphia, selling baskets and moccasins and other nicknicks skilfully made by their women-folk. Hearing of the good food to be had for the asking in Germantown, the men set out for the feast, leaving the squaws to look after their peddling.

Arriving at Denewood they quickly sought the kitchens and squatted in the brick-paved court, wrapped in their blankets.

They were well fed, and though they offered no thanks and their countenances changed not from the look of stolid indifference they always wore, 't was plain they liked their treatment, for having gorged themselves, they moved to the front of the house, where they gave an exhibition of their skill with the bow and arrow, perchance as an acknowledgment of their entertainment.

The weather was still warm and the appearance of the Indians brought several of the guests out of doors to watch the shooting. Small coins were set up by the gentlemen to stimulate the sport, the money going to the lucky archer who hit the mark.

The shouts of acclaim at each winning shot soon brought Bee and Cousin John, glad mayhap of a relief from the formalities of their position, and in their train came many more, among whom were Allen McLane and Hal Travers, the latter much excited at the sight of the redskins.

"Now this is the real America!" he cried, and

straightway took a leading part in encouraging the savages to greater efforts.

Doubtless because the Indians made such easy work of their marksmanship Hal thought it a simple matter and was soon for having a try at the game himself, though he came not near his target. Then one or two of the other gentlemen who had had more experience, undertook to show him how the trick was done and this led to a test of skill between the braves and several of our guests, in which the latter were invariably the losers.

One would think that this did not greatly matter, seeing that it was but natural the Indian warriors should excel in the use of their own weapons, but experience has shown that the moment a savage has the better of his pale-face brother he straightway becomes arrogant and insulting, both in speech and manner.

And so it happened upon this occasion. At each losing shot derisive grunts and short scornful laughs went up from the little band, who began to strut about, showing plainly enough their contempt for the white man.

I was standing beside Allen McLane, who I noticed was beginning to scowl.

"I like this not," he muttered, and crossing to Bee, he began to urge Cousin John to take a hand in the shooting.

"Has John any skill with the bow and arrow?" asked Bee, much surprised.

"Aye," answered Allen, "he 's better than any Indian I ever saw."

" 'T is but a matter of acquiring the knack when one is young," said Cousin John indifferently. "Allen himself can shoot as well as I."

"Nay, that I cannot," protested the Major, "and you know it."

"You can beat any of these fellows," declared John positively, "and I think some one should put them in their place. 'T was a foolish thing to start a match with them. They 'll be insulting us if no one takes them down a peg."

" 'T is what I 've been thinking," Allen answered him. "They 're a dangerous lot to trifle with."

"But surely they 'll do us no harm," said Bee, whose experience with Indians had been small.

"Nay, they would n't dare meddle with us," Cousin John assented. "We are too near to Philadelphia, but in the country where settlers are few, such incidents as this give the savages courage to commit all sorts of outrages. 'T is never wise to let them go away thinking they have the best of the whites at anything."

"And can Allen beat them?" asked Bee.

"Aye, that he can, an he will," answered Cousin John. So, because he thought it his duty, Allen McLane was persuaded to try his hand with the bow and arrow.

It soon became evident that the pale-faces had found a champion. One after another Allen beat the Indians. First for the distance he could shoot an arrow, in which none could come nigh his mark, and then at aiming at a shilling placed twice as far away as it had been previously. We cheered him again and again, and the savages threw down their bows one after another in acknowledgment that they were beaten.

At length, when we thought the matter at an end, Major McLane walked back to rejoin us; but, just as he came up to Bee, another Indian, who heretofore had taken no part in the shooting

but had sat wrapped in his blanket, silent and to all seeming unheeding, halted him.

"The pale-face shoots well against such as these," he said scornfully, with a wave of his hand toward the squatting Indians. His tone was insolent and I saw that both Cousin John and Allen McLane were angry.

"Would you lesson me?" demanded the latter in a challenging tone.

"Tiscoquam shoots not at silver pieces that shine white against the blackness of a tree," answered the Indian defiantly. "That is the play of women and papooses."

"Then we 'll give you a richer though a slighter mark," cried Cousin John, and putting his hand into his pocket he brought out a golden half-Joe. This he placed in the bark of a tree, at the height of a tall man.

"Now choose your distance," he said to the savage, who, though he was not wont to express aught of what he felt, smiled grimly.

The little spot of yellow showed dimly enough at twenty paces, but the Indian, with one sharp glance at it, turned his back and walked slowly away. We watched him, thinking he would face

about at each step, but still he went on, until he was a long bow-shot from the mark. Here he stopped and sticking an arrow in the ground at his feet, raised his head and faced us.

"Tiscoquam shoots from here," he called, and the other Indians grunted and edged nearer, while those of our party shook their heads dubiously as they walked to the point he had marked.

"Now am I beaten," said Allen under his breath. "I doubt if I can see the mark, much less hit it."

"He has yet to hit it himself," growled Cousin John. "'T is but effrontery, yet we must beat him now."

"Then 't is you will have to do it," declared Allen.

"Nay, you will shoot as well as he," Cousin John answered, as we reached the spot where the brave had taken his stand.

"But you cannot see the gold," cried Bee, looking toward the tree where it was set; then she lifted a little wreath of orange blossoms that crowned her head, and running to the mark hung the white circlet about the small coin.

"There," she panted, as she ran back to us,

"there is gold and a crown for the winner. May both be yours, Allen," she added in an undertone.

Tiscoquam still held his slight grin of insolence, but entered no protest at Bee's making the target clearer. With a proud gesture he restrung his bow, and carefully choosing an arrow from his quiver he handed both to Allen.

"Take the best, pale-face," he said, " and if he hits the gold Tiscoquam will call him brother and no child."

"I care not what you call me," growled Allen, as he took the bow and stepped to the mark, in no wise pleased with the prospect.

He stood for a moment, glancing along the shaft to see that it was unwarped and balancing the bow in his hand, while his audience remained silent, a little anxious as to the outcome. And we were not the only ones who realized that the contest had in it something more of seriousness than would appear upon the surface. There were two sides sharply drawn now, and each had a champion who, to the minds of the redskins at least, would prove the prowess of his race.

We held our breaths as Allen pulled the bowstring to his ear and let fly the shaft. We watched its flight for an instant and then a little murmur of disappointment went up from the whites, for though the arrow hit the tree it was a good two inches above the white wreath.

The Indians grunted in satisfaction, and Tiscoquam took the bow, his head held high and his glance meeting Allen's in a defiant stare.

"He 's my master," Allen acknowledged, as he walked up to us, sore disappointed at his poor showing. "You 'll have to save us, Jack."

"Nay, I 'm in no mind—" began Cousin John, and it was plain to be seen he had no wish to push himself forward, but Bee interrupted him.

"You 'll do it for me, dear," she begged. " I 've never seen you use a bow."

"Anything for you," he answered quickly, "but you 'll not ask me to make a show of myself should Tiscoquam fail to hit the mark?"

We had not long to wait. The tall Indian, easy of movement and as graceful as a wild animal, chose his arrow and stepped lithely to the spot, with an assurance that showed how confident he was. Taking careful aim he loosed the

feathered wood upon its way. True to its mark it sped, hitting fairly in the center of the wreath, and the gold coin leaped in the air and fell at the foot of the tree, while the arrow remained trembling in the trunk.

"Bravo!" came the cry, for it was such an exhibition as drew the admiration of all who saw it, and though it seemed our side was beaten we could not hold back a cheer.

One of the black boys who had been looking on ran to the target and, picking up the gold piece, brought it to Bee.

She took it and with a kindly smile went to Tiscoquam, who stood proudly alone, scornful of the applause.

"The gold is yours, Tiscoquam," she said, holding the scarred coin out to him. "'T was a fine shot and you have won your reward fairly. But there is another who can bend the bow and who would match you, not for gold but for the garland. Will you shoot with him?"

Tiscoquam looked at her for a moment without speaking or making any move to take the gold piece, then, shaking his head, he stepped back a pace from her.

"Who dares shoot an arrow against Tiscoquam?" he demanded.

"My husband," said Bee, softly, and it was the first time I had heard her use that word.

"Let him come," replied the brave. "If he can win the wreath, then is he worthy to be wedded to such a mate."

At this Cousin John stepped up to them.

"Come, Tiscoquam," he said shortly. "Give me your bow. I 'll shoot you for the wreath."

"At what mark?" asked the Indian.

"The arrow in the center of it!" cried John. "The one who splits it shall keep the garland."

"Good," grunted Tiscoquam; "shoot first," and Cousin John stepped to the mark.

With scarce a moment's aim his bow-string twanged, and with a splintering of the wood, Tiscoquam's shaft was split and in its place was the one Cousin John had loosed. The wreath, shaken from its fastening by the jar, fell down and hung swaying from the arrow.

Here indeed was one who could shoot straight.

In a moment the whole scene was changed. Tiscoquam had been applauded, but only in a

spirit of fair play. Now that our own side had won, we cheered with a will.

Cousin John handed back the bow to Tiscoquam, saying,

"Split my arrow now, and so on till one or other of us misses." But the warrior shook his head.

"The wreath is won," he said; "another mark must serve."

Forthwith he cut a long, thin sapling with his hunting-knife, and, peeling off the bark till it looked like a silver wand, he stuck it in the ground, set it swaying and returned to the mark.

"See!" he cried, and scarce taking any more aim than had Cousin John he split it neatly in halves.

"Tiscoquam will set another mark," he volunteered, starting off, but Cousin John called him back.

"Nay, do not trouble," he said, indicating half of the stick that still waved in the breeze; "there is mark enough," and in another moment he had split the half, while all about him sounded cheers and exclamations of wonder.

But Tiscoquam was not to be outdone, and set-

ting up the fallen half he too divided it equally and was on even terms with Cousin John. Neither had yet won an advantage, for though Tiscoquam had not shattered an arrow, to hit the moving wand was a more difficult feat.

Then Cousin John sent one of the boys for two apples and when the lad brought them he handed the smaller of them to Allen McLane to toss into the air.

"Can you hit it?" demanded Allen, filled with amazement.

"I could once upon a time," answered Cousin John, "and I do not seem to have lost the knack of it yet. Throw it up."

All stood astounded when it became evident what he was attempting to do, and in breathless silence we watched him give the signal. With bow-string taut, he aimed but an instant and, as the apple reached its highest point, and seemed to hang in the air, he loosed the arrow which pierced the target through the center.

So loud was the cheering and so great the excitement that for the moment naught could be heard but cries of "Bravo!" "Well shot!" and the like. Allen McLane would have hugged

Cousin John, I am sure, if it had not been that he cared not to show the Indian that any particular exploit had been performed.

Cousin John held out the other apple to Tiscoquam but the brave refused it, and then, with a dramatic gesture, he unstrung his bow, acknowledging defeat. With a glance at Bee he strode to where the wreath was still hanging, and plucking it from off the arrow came swiftly back to her.

"Tiscoquam is beaten," he said. "His bow is broken and trailed in the dust. But not in shame. His pale-face brother would be a match for the mightiest warrior." Then turning to Cousin John he handed him the wreath. "The prize goes to the young Eagle!" he cried.

"Nay," exclaimed Bee, "there are two prizes!" and once more she held out the gold piece to the Indian. This time he took it.

"Till Tiscoquam goes to the Hills of the Mighty Men this lies on his breast," he declared. Then stretching out his arm he looked at Bee and Cousin John standing side by side. "Great Chief!" he announced in a loud voice, pointing to Cousin John, and then to Bee, "Great Squaw!"

and in the silence following his words he stayed for an instant looking at them, standing very stiff and straight with his hand held high above his head, then swiftly he turned and disappeared into the woods near us.

So impressive was the warrior's manner that for a moment no one spoke, then there was a general laugh and for many days thereafter it was a joke among us to call the two "Great Chief and Great Squaw," but it was no jest to Tiscoquam, as we were to learn in after years.

CHAPTER V

JACKY GOES A-HUNTING

"'TIS a long road that hath no turning," as Mummer says, though to be sure I have seldom heard him speak so long a sentence, he being a very silent man; but Mrs. Mummer hath ever some such wise saw of his upon her tongue and 't is a fitting beginning for an account of the events which took place during the six years following Bee's wedding.

Strangely enough the prophecies of the bridal cake came true. Sally Wister who found the thimble was still a maid, and Betty had been the first to wed. She married Hal Travers, and they were settled in a pretty spot on Chestnut Hill not far from us. Hal's brother, Sir Horace, had treated him handsomely and Cousin John, too, had a hand in setting him up, so that he and his wife lacked for nothing, and if they took life not too seriously, they nevertheless had many friends

and were greatly sought after for all social affairs.

'T will be hard to credit I know, but Polly, my oldest sister, who had vowed again and again that she would ne'er wed with a "country lout," as she called our soldiers, married Mark Powell, a young man who had won a commission by merit alone. When I think of her making eyes at the Marquis de Lafayette and of her silly flirtations with every titled gentleman she met, 't is scarce to be believed that she had the good sense to choose Mark in the end; but it is true that she did, and I have to confess that I liked her more the day she brought me the news than ever I had before. 'T was not the same Polly, and to my thinking the change was for the better.

Bart, my brother, was yet unwed. He grieved secretly I think that peace had been declared and was ever hopeful that another war might break out. He lived at Haddonfield with my father, always holding himself in readiness to be the first to enlist should the need arise.

For myself, what I wished for most had come to pass. I was still at Denewood with my darling Bee, proud to be "Aunty Peg" to her three chil-

dren. Being myself motherless, as she was, my own home in Haddonfield, in the Jerseys, had been somewhat cheerless, through no one's fault exactly. Polly and Betty were much older, and Bart thought himself too much of a man to take any notice of the baby of the family. Father was good and kind when I saw him, but he was away on business much of the time so that I was ever lonely.

From the first I had loved Bee, who had taken me to her heart, and the thought of leaving her was more than I could bear. Yet when the danger from the British troops was at an end the necessity which had brought us all to Denewood was over and I lived in dread that I should be summoned again to my home.

But when peace with England was finally declared my father married again. This altered the situation, and Bee's pleas, coupled with my own and Cousin John's urging that I should stay, finally won father to our way of thinking.

So it came about, as I had wished, that I was permanently a member of the household at Denewood.

The six years passed did not seem to have made

any of its members older. To be sure, Mrs. Mummer complained now and then of a crook in her back, and Mummer looked, if it were possible, a little more withered, but all the servants we had known in our childhood were still there and, bond or free, nothing would have induced any of them to leave the family.

Our one mystery was yet unsolved. How my ring had found its way into the bridal cake remained unexplained. We had wondered and puzzled over it for weeks, expecting that sooner or later so valuable a trinket would be sought for, but no one had come to claim it, and, as the years went by, we had ceased to think much about it.

I wore it always, albeit my finger had not grown to fit it, so that it was still wrapped to keep it from slipping off, but I was monstrous proud of it and made a point of stamping the sealing wax on my letters with the device cut into the stone.

So there I was in my sixteenth year with Bee and Cousin John and the three children, lacking naught to make me happy and quite content to end my days with those I loved best on earth.

Truly so far the road had been smooth and straight.

One morning in the early spring, just as we were finishing breakfast and I had wiped the milk from little Majory's lips, Cousin John jumped up from the table with the announcement that he would not be home till late that night and that no one was to wait up for him.

"Oh, yes," said Bee, as if she had just remembered something, " 't is the day you entertain the Indians."

"That 's it," replied Cousin John, "and to tell the truth I 'd a deal rather be at home. But it has been thought advisable to smoke a pipe of peace with them. So our society, the Sons of St. Tammany, has invited them to a pow-wow at our wigwam near the Indian Queen Tavern."

"Now what 's all this about?" I asked, seeing little Jack's eyes grow big at the word Indian.

"There is a party of Iroquois, headed by Cornplanter and five other chiefs, on their way to New York," Cousin John explained. "They have certain matters to lay before Congress and we want them to be in a good humor when they get there."

"I 'm going to see the Indians," declared Jacky, getting up from the table and standing beside his father, as if indeed he meant to start that instant.

"I wonder you have no curiosity about them," Cousin John went on. "It will be a vastly ceremonious affair with a salute of thirteen guns, and the warriors will dance around the council fire by way of returning the compliment. Then there will be a barbecue, and taking it altogether it will be a sight worth seeing. There will be plenty of spectators. I 've a mind to take the boy."

"Mercy me, Miss Bee!" cried Mrs. Mummer, who had never abandoned that loved form of address, "you 'll never let him do it, dearie,"—and then, to Cousin John, "When have you ever had the care of the child for the whole day, Master John? ' 'T is a foolish man who bites off more than he can chew,' as Mummer would tell you. Please have that in mind ere you talk of taking the boy a dozen miles from us."

"Nay, now," Jacky put in, "I want to see the Indians. Perchance they will let me go with them to shoot a deer."

"And who will look after me while Dada is away?" asked Bee with a loving smile at him.

"There 's Aunty Peg," he replied on the instant. He was but five, but as Mrs. Mummer said, quoting her husband as usual, "He 'd ne'er swing for the want of a tongue."

But his father liked not his answer.

"Nay, Jacky, my boy, that 's no way for a man to talk," he said seriously. " 'T is your place and mine to take care of your mother and sister, and not put it off on Aunt Peg or any one else."

"There 's Allen," said Jacky, with a sly glance up at his father, referring to his brother who was but a scant twelve-month old.

Mrs. Mummer turned away to hide a smile and 't was all I could do to keep a straight face.

"He 'll help when he grows up, never fear," declared Cousin John, "but until he does we must not shirk, and, since I must go, 't will be best that you stay."

Jacky drooped a lip but he was too wise to cry before his father, and Mrs. Mummer, seeing his disappointment and doubtless feeling that it was all her fault, took him off to the pantry where he was soon made merry again.

"Perhaps Peg would like to see the savages," Bee suggested, but I shook my head.

"Nay, I 'll stay home with the other children," I said, though in truth I should have been glad to go had Bee been inclined that way.

"Come, Peg. Why not?" Cousin John insisted. "Hal and Betty can look out for you. I 'll send them word."

"Thanks, Cousin John," I answered, "but I 'd rather stay at home."

"I might have known you 'd ne'er stir without Bee," he said with a laugh, for he was always teasing me with being tied to her apron-string.

"Nay, some day I 'll run off and surprise you," I retorted, and left the dining-room to take up my daily tasks.

Perhaps my own interest in the Indian reception made me sympathetic with Jacky in his disappointment; but however it was, when my duties were finished I went off to find him, thinking we would walk to the woods and pick some of the wild flowers that were just springing up.

Now with a view to making the boy manly, Cousin John had given him free rein to roam around about the Denewood estate so long as he

remained within certain known bounds. It was a wide territory, but Jacky had his favorite haunts and these I visited first, failing, however, to find him. There was one grassy glade through which a tiny brook wound its way that I had not yet explored, and quickening my pace, for I felt a sudden anxiety, I hurried to the extreme limit of Jacky's boundary.

On my way I met one of the negro laborers and stopped him for news of the boy.

"No, Missy, I ain't done seen little Massa," he answered, in reply to my question. "I ain't seen nobody 'ceptin' 't is a Injun."

"An Indian!" I echoed. "Where? What kind of an Indian?"

"Oh, he was jes' a common Injun, Missy, goin' to the barbecue," he answered plaintively. "I knows a black boy wishes he was agwine."

I went on more rapidly after this, a little frightened though I knew not why, and as I came to the edge of the forest bordering the road, Hal Travers galloped by.

I hailed him and he turned back to where I was standing.

"Have you seen anything of little Jack?" I

asked, showing none of my anxiety, for I wished not that Bee should be alarmed and I knew Hal well enough to be assured that he would make a mountain out of a molehill if given half a chance.

"Aye, that I did," he answered readily. "He ran out of the edge of the woods near the great oak. He wanted to know where I was going and when I told him I was on my way to Denewood for the day he seemed much pleased. He asked if I would take care of 'Mover' while he went and 'shooted' a deer. When I agreed, he disappeared. You 'll find him a little way above here," he ended, pointing up the road.

This news, which seemed innocent enough, added to my alarm, for Jacky was out of bounds, and knowing him for an obedient child, I felt certain there was something behind this infraction of the rules.

"Anything the matter?" asked Hal, evidently noting somewhat of my feelings.

I was in two minds to tell him what was in my thoughts, though to be sure I should have had hard work to express them, but having no reason to believe that Jacky was not within reach and knowing Hal's failing for exaggeration, I was

not willing to run the risk of alarming Bee for naught.

"I was just looking for the boy," I answered with a show of indifference. "I don't quite like his being so far from the house alone. But don't say aught to Bee about it. There 's no need to make her anxious."

"Oh, let the boy be!" cried Hal. "You women will make a mollycoddle of him. When my Horrie is his age 't will be a governor he 'll have, and not a nursemaid at his elbow."

There was no need to answer this, for 't was a joke among us how Betty ruled her husband, and that no other boy living received the coddling her son did.

"I 'm going on," I told Hal, and he waved his hat to me and set his horse on the gallop on his way to Denewood.

Once in the woods again I made all speed to the place he had indicated; but no sign of the boy did I find, though I pushed on more and more rapidly, looking to all quarters as well as I was able for the trees.

At length I began to think that I must be going in the wrong direction and was about to turn

back, when my eye chanced on a small whistle which I knew on the instant for Jacky's. I picked it up, satisfied now that the boy could not be far away, and hurried on.

A moment later I was rather surprised to come out into an open space of perhaps ten acres and there, near the wood bounding the opposite side, I saw an Indian, and beside him trudged Jack. In great excitement I prepared to hail them.

Now all my life my stutter had plagued me more than any one knew, and I had fought it and I thought had conquered it, yet here, when I most needed to speak quickly, it again tricked me.

In faith I could not speak at all, and as I struggled against this weakness, stumbling forward the while, my hand clutching at my throat, which seemed to catch the words ere they were uttered and refuse to let them out, I saw the Indian stoop down and pick up the boy, setting him on his shoulder. Then in an instant before I had uttered a word, they both disappeared into the wood.

CHAPTER VI

PEG TURNS TRAPPER

FOR a moment after little Jack and the Indian had disappeared I stood still, so appalled that I scarce seemed able to move. It is true that I had been apprehensive at not finding the boy, but that came from a vague fear that he might have wandered too far. That he should have been stolen by a savage or any one else had never entered my mind.

I came to my senses and tore wildly across the open space to the spot where they had disappeared and then on into the forest. I was nigh to panic and ran blindly, conscious only of a great fear in my heart; but after a time my thoughts cleared and, though my alarm was not less, I realized that I must summon all my wits if I would regain the boy.

I slowed my pace and took thought of my surroundings with a view to finding some trace of the Indian's passage through the wood. I knew

of men to whom every bent twig would have told a story; who could find footprints even on the leaves and moss; who could follow a trail unerringly by signs that were not visible to the unskilled; and, though I lacked experience in this wood lore, I had heard much of the methods and made an effort to use what I could remember of it.

But search as I might there were no signs to guide me that I could understand. I stopped and listened, shuddering at the solemn stillness of the deep forest which I knew hid a host of living creatures, eying me hostilely even as I stood. All about me in the silent sunlit solitude were huge trees, putting out tender shoots of green through which the shimmering light shed shifting shadows on the soft earth. At my feet the brown carpet of leaves was starred with hepaticas, bloodroot and anemones, while here and there little clumps of fern fronds made emerald patches and sprouts of dog-tooth violets, splashed with darker color, marked a damper spot or perhaps a spring.

But though there was naught to tell me in which direction my path lay, naught was to be gained by standing still, so I started forward,

heeding not the briers that caught at my skirts as if to stay my progress.

Ere long I began to question the wisdom of my attempt to catch the Indian. Might it not be wiser to return to Denewood and give the alarm? Against this was the time it would require to retrace my steps and also the feeling that it would seem almost as if I were turning my back upon Jacky. Moreover, sooner or later there would be inquiries for both the boy and me, Hal would then tell of our meeting, and I had no doubt they would be after us in short order.

So I determined to go on. It was what my love for the child dictated and, as if to confirm this decision, my glance was suddenly arrested by a blood-root flower crushed into the brown leaves a yard or two ahead of me.

I leaned down to examine it and found that it was freshly broken, for the thick red sap which gives the flower its name was not yet dry, and, though I was not sure, it looked to me, as if there was a slight depression around the broken plant that might have been made by a foot. Eagerly I peered about, hoping to see other signs, and was rewarded by finding a dead leaf turned

up to show the damp under side. Something must have disturbed it but a short while before, and my heart gave a great bound of joy.

Then, to dash my spirits, came the thought that an animal might have left such traces.

But proof of this was easy, and standing beside the crushed flower I stepped forward toward the upturned leaf. To my delight I found that the distance was about what I would judge a man's pace to be and once more, as if to reward my patience, a broken flower the same space away in a straight line caught my eye.

Here surely was evidence that some person had been walking there, and, though I saw no further signs, these three marks gave me the general direction of the traveler and spurred me on to continue the pursuit. True, it might not be the Indian at all, but I put this thought from me.

I went forward more cautiously now, alert to catch any other indication that I had reasoned truly, yet found naught more to point the way; but I reflected that I had a redskin to deal with, and tales of them had taught me that I should

not have seen his three footprints had he not been careless or indifferent.

After a space I began again to doubt that I was on the right track and presently stopped in despair. I had come such a way without anything to hearten me. It seemed utterly hopeless to go on blindly in that great forest and I was about to give up when I bethought me of a tale I had been told, that sounds a great way off can be heard if one sets an ear to the ground.

In an instant I had dropped to my knees and, brushing aside the dry leaves, pressed my head against the damp earth, listening with all my might.

At first there was naught, then soft pats upon the ground came to me faintly. I strained every nerve and caught a regular beat like the slow jog-trot of a man. Moreover, I judged it to be not far away.

I leaped to my feet ready to shout "Jacky" at the top of my voice; but ere I did so a new thought entered my mind and I put my hand to my mouth to stifle the cry. I was sure that if the Indian knew he was being followed my chance

of ever catching up with him would vanish. Naught save his carelessness and great good luck on my part, had brought me thus near him. I must still be cautious till I sighted him.

I pressed forward at top speed and presently came to a brook running merrily among the gray stones. In two minds whether to cross or not, I stopped to listen. This time I heard no sounds though I crushed my ear closer than ever to the damp earth.

"He has halted," I said to myself as I arose; but somehow I did not feel sure of it.

"Nay," I murmured on second thought, "he has taken to the brook to hide his trail. I 've heard of that Indian trick."

Of this I felt certain and was gladdened, for now I had only to take the merry stream as my guide and could push on more rapidly.

And at last I had my reward. My long chase was not for naught. Ahead of me, picking his way carefully among the stones was a tall Indian and on his back he carried Jacky. My heart nigh ceased its beating with joy at the sight.

"Jacky!" I cried at the top of my voice, "Jacky! Jacky!"

CHAPTER VII

THE EAGLET

MY shout halted the savage abruptly and he wheeled about to face me, showing plainly enough that my appearance was a complete surprise; but he waited only an instant, then turned, and stepping out of the water, plunged into the woods. With a bound across the little stream I took after him as fast as I could, for having come this far I was not to be put off.

"Jacky!" I kept calling as I ran. "Jacky! Wait for me," and though I did not gain, the Indian, hampered by the boy, drew no farther away from me and we raced on for a time, neither securing any advantage.

But at length my breath began to come in shorter gasps and I knew that in the end I must be distanced.

Jacky, however, now took a hand in the matter and I heard him crying at the top of his voice.

"I tell you 't is Aunty Peg. I will stop and speak to her," and I saw him beat the warrior about the head with his little fists.

I had no hope that the boy's childish efforts would deter the Indian, but to my surprise and delight the savage stopped in obedience to his orders and set him upon the ground, where they waited till I came up to them.

"Oh, Jacky," I panted, "what are you doing out of bounds alone?"

"I am n't alone, Aunty Peg," he answered readily and with truth. "We 're going to shoot a deer and Uncle Hal is taking care of Mover, so I 'm not needed at home—and I am n't naughty."

It all came out in such a burst of injured innocence that I saw he had no idea he was doing aught he should not have done, and for a moment I was at a loss.

"The fledgling must some day leave the nest," said the Indian in a deep voice, "to chain it is to cripple it; yet even an eaglet must be taught to fly."

"The Eaglet 's my Indian name. I like it better than Jack," put in the boy, complacently, but

I heeded not his words, for I was looking at the redskin before me. His face was familiar, as if perchance I had seen him before, but I could in no wise place the time or circumstance. He was adorned as for a ceremony. His moccasins were rich with beads, his leggings fringed and embroidered with quills of the porcupine, and he was painted gaily with yellow, red, and white. Round his head was a figured band which held two eagle feathers arrogantly upright, and he had the haughty manner of a chief.

Little Jack too, I noted, had a worked band about his head with one feather sticking in it, and this afforded me much comfort, for I had heard that Indians strip of all ornament those they mean to scalp, and paint their victims black as well. Thus there was no indication that any harm was intended to the boy; nevertheless the situation seemed threatening enough, and I decided that my best plan was to put a bold front on the matter and show the savage that I at least was not afraid.

"You had no right to take the boy," I said to him. "He is too young to leave his mother."

"The maiden can say where the Eaglet is," he

returned stolidly, adding as if it were an afterthought, "Tell the mother of the Eaglet that the appointed time is come."

"Think you I will desert the boy?" I exclaimed, for he seemed to take it for granted that I would start back immediately. "I shall not leave him."

"It is well," he replied indifferently. "Now we go."

He took Jacky's hand and started forward with a light step.

"Nay," I protested, "that is not the way to his home."

"The Eaglet's home lies where Tiscoquam is going," he answered, and strode off, with Jacky trudging happily along beside him.

There was naught I could do but accompany them and keep my wits about me. I felt certain that by dinner-time we must be missed and the search for us organized, so I concluded that the best thing for me to do now was to stay by the boy until we were found.

When the sun was at its highest the Indian suddenly stopped and settled down on his haunches with a grunt.

"Eat here," he announced, and drew forth

from his pouch a piece of dried meat. Cutting it into thin strips he handed some slices to Jacky, but the boy relished it not.

"If this is venison I 'd rather have fowl, thank you," he said, but as no fowl was forthcoming he ate a portion of the meat on my telling him that hunters must take the rough with the smooth.

After the savage had eaten his fill he wiped his knife upon the sole of his moccasin and handed it and the lump of meat to me. A woman, to his thinking, could expect naught better than second place, and though I had no particular inclination to eat, I knew that all my strength was needed and made shift to gnaw a little of the dried flesh. The knife, however, had been but indifferently cleansed and so, before I used it, I took the precaution to thrust it once or twice into some damp earth, after which I wiped it upon a clump of newly sprouted ferns.

All this I did with as much show of coolness as I could muster. To tell the truth, I was at my wit's end to know what was best to be done, but I was certain that a show of courage would not hurt my cause; for all the while the Indian watched me with eyes that gleamed like spark-

ling bits of jet, though he scarce moved a muscle, nor could I learn aught of what he thought from the expression of his face. He simply sat there eying me, and I went on with my meal, trying to seem as indifferent as he.

At length he drew forth his tobacco pouch and, after throwing a pinch of tobacco into the air to placate some deity of his own, he filled a small pipe. This he lighted with two flints struck together against some dried pith and began to smoke, ignoring me completely, as if he had decided that my presence mattered little one way or the other.

Jacky, seeking entertainment, had wandered off a little and I thought it a good time to come to an understanding with the redskin if I could, so I turned to him and speaking with as few words as possible after the Indian fashion, demanded what he meant to do with the boy.

"The Eaglet goes to his home," he answered, and turned his eyes to what I guessed was the northward.

"Nay, you wish to deceive me," I protested; "his home lies not there."

"His home lies with his people, the Mengive,"

he retorted. This startled me, for it is what the Iroquois call themselves and their lands lie far from Denewood.

"Who are you?" I asked. "I thought you were a Delaware."

"Tiscoquam is no Lenni-Lenape slave," he said, half angrily, the Delawares being subject to the Iroquois. Then with a quick gesture he put his hand to his neck and plucked out a stout cord at the end of which glittered a bit of yellow gold, which he held toward me. It was the battered half-Joe that had centered the target of the bride's wreath, and, as I looked, the scene of the shooting-match that had taken place soon after Bee's marriage came back to me and I understood why this man's face had been vaguely familiar.

"I remember," I murmured under my breath.

"Tiscoquam is a chief of the Senecas," he announced proudly.

"What has the boy to do with you?" I asked, after a moment. "What mean you when you talk of 'his people.' He is no Indian, though his hair is black."

"Is he not the papoose of the young Eagles?" he demanded, showing in the flashing of his eyes

the intensity of his feeling; "is he not the son of the great white chief, who shoots with the bow of the red man? Is he not the son of the great squaw, who fears naught and looks with the level eyes of the warrior? Tiscoquam knows he is the child the Mengive have need of."

"But think of his poor mother," I gasped.

"Pity her not," said Tiscoquam, sternly. "The mother of every eaglet knows that it will fly some day, yet would she rather be the mother of that eaglet than of the timid lapwing. He goes to his people," he ended, with his voice dropped low as if he whispered, but had he shouted it, it could not have been more impressive.

I knew not what to say. I was helpless in the face of the grim determination of the savage before me.

"Listen to a true tale," he began suddenly, speaking as if to himself. "For many moons Tiscoquam has waited. His people have grown timid as does. Their hunting-grounds are given to the plow. Their lands melt like ice at the breath of spring. Tiscoquam has seen his chiefs follow Cornplanter to the island of Manhattan to

beg of the white men's council that the redskins be not enslaved even as are the blacks." The words came out with a rush of anger and he spat upon the ground as though he had poison in his mouth.

"But this has naught to do with the boy," I said, quite bewildered, for I saw that he spoke from the bitterness of his heart. "He is but a child and cannot endanger your liberties."

"For many moons Tiscoquam has waited," he repeated, calm again after his outburst. "He has watched this sachem and that. He has said of this one, 'He is great and will lead the Senecas as of old.' He has thought of such a warrior, 'He will widen our lands, and the braves of the Iroquois will be as the leaves of the forest.' But no! The people dwindle. Their lodges are few, and they are cut down like the grass of the fields. They are led to Manhattan to seek favor of their white oppressors. Their hearts are turned to water."

He stopped for a moment as if the recollection of his humiliation was more than he could bear.

"But to-day Tiscoquam turned his face from the council fires," he went on, a grimmer tone

coming into his voice. "Tiscoquam knows that all the Senecas lack is a great warrior. He pondered these matters as he walked alone in the forest and his spirit was sad within him. Then came the young Eaglet. In his heart there was no fear for the red warrior. The eyes of the Eaglet met the eyes of Tiscoquam. The heart of the Eaglet is one with the heart of Tiscoquam. The Eaglet asks good hunting. Then Tiscoquam looks back into the past. He sees the marriage feast; the young Eagle whose arrow pierces the apple in the air; the Squaw with eyes that hold no fear. He remembers the shooting and his spirit is once more glad within him. The Great Spirit has answered the prayer of Tiscoquam. Tiscoquam has found the warrior who shall lead the Iroquois to victory." He ended in a low voice even as before, but lifting his arms straight up beside his head, the fingers outstretched as if to touch the heavens.

There was silence for a moment. It was all too plain to me that the Indian, though he meant no harm to Jacky, was yet fixed upon his purpose, and I, a weak girl, could in no way change his will.

"Think you his father will sit idle and let you steal his son?" I asked.

"The young Eagle can shoot with the bow," Tiscoquam answered calmly; "can he follow the trail as well? Tiscoquam and the Eaglet will go fast and far."

"You cannot go so far that I will not go too," I replied promptly.

Tiscoquam waved his hand as if to brush away a subject in which he had no interest.

"Enough," he grunted. "A brave has not the heart of a woman. Go back and tell the pale-faces Tiscoquam has the Eaglet, and let them catch him if they can."

"I will not leave the boy," I answered stubbornly.

"Come then, but murmur not lest Tiscoquam lose patience," said the Indian. "The Eaglet shall grow strong. He shall be the king of a great nation. His white blood will give him the cunning to put at naught the purposes of the white men. His red heart will give him the courage to lead red men. The Eaglet shall rule the Senecas. The Senecas shall rule the land once more."

He rose suddenly to his feet. "The time to take the trail has come," he ended.

'T was plain he had no mind to argue further so I took little Jack's hand and prepared to follow in silence.

CHAPTER VIII

MAGIC

ERE we took our flight through the forest Tiscoquam was at pains to obliterate all signs of our resting-place and made it plain that he meant to leave no trace behind.

Whether this came about as the result of my threat that Cousin John would surely follow I know not, but it set me thinking and I resolved to mark our path wherever an opportunity served.

"Tiscoquam's way lies here," the Indian grunted, pointing to the brook as we started. "Go before."

I protested that I preferred to follow along the bank, but he would have his way, and seeing that I had no choice I took off my shoes and stockings to wade the stream.

As I stepped into the water I chose a soft spot on the edge to set my foot, thinking that the print of it would show the way to those who followed, but Tiscoquam was not to be fooled. Casting an

evil glance at me he lifted a flat stone from the bed of the brook and set it upon the place. In a few moments the gray rock would dry, leaving naught to betray its sudden change of position.

"Go!" growled Tiscoquam, and I splashed ahead, realizing that his sharp eyes would be upon me every moment. Nevertheless my brain was busy and my position in front at least permitted me to set the pace, which I took care should not be too swift, though I was ordered now and then to cease my loitering.

In this way we went on for several miles, but at length, much to my relief, for my feet began to suffer from the sharp stones, we took to the woods again and I was allowed to put on my shoes and stockings.

After leaving the stream the Indian was not so watchful of my doings, thinking doubtless that none would pick up our path at the end of that long passage through the brook. This gave me a chance to break a twig here and there along the way and to do such other things as occurred to me to make our route clear.

All the while Jacky seemed as happy as the day, and the redskin was as quick to please the child

as if he were already the great chief of his dreams. I saw no need of telling the boy in what danger we lay. Rather did it seem wise to encourage his innocent attachment for the savage, for his own protection.

So we plodded on for two hours or more, chatting of the deer to be killed, always just a little deeper in the forest, while my heart grew heavier and heavier as I thought of poor Bee's anxiety and my own helplessness.

Finally, as the sun began to cast long rays between the tree trunks, we stopped.

"Here is the place to kindle fire," said the Indian, stringing his bow. "Tiscoquam goes to shoot squirrels. The pale face maiden must gather sticks," and with that he disappeared into the forest.

The fact that he feared not to leave us alone, showed all too plainly how helpless we were to escape; but his absence gave me an opportunity for which I had been longing.

Always my thoughts were on those I hoped were already looking for us, and if in any way I could let them know that we were headed for the Iroquois country in the North, such information

might save them many days of vain searching and bring the succor we stood in such dire need of.

If I could but write a note telling of our destination perchance it might be found by those tracing our steps. But this was easier said than done, as Mummer might have said it.

In my pack-pocket there was but a small housewife, naught else, not so much as a handkerchief. I thought at first to scratch my message on a piece of birch-bark, but there were none of those trees about, and I racked my brains to think what I could use as I gathered faggots at Tiscoquam's order.

Just then Jacky, who was helping me, opened his hand and showed me three pieces of paper, which he had been holding rolled up in his hot little palm.

" 'T was lucky I brought these to light the fire," he announced proudly, looking at me with a happy smile.

Here before me was one of the materials I needed and I cast about for the best way to obtain it from him without risking suspicion of my purpose, for a chance word of his might betray the secret to the savage.

"Jacky!" I cried, with a show of surprise at his proposal, "you would never light a fire with paper? No true hunter does it in that fashion."

"Do they not, Aunty Peggy?" he asked innocently. "How then do they manage?"

Now I was as ignorant of the matter as he, but I looked wise and shook my head.

"Watch the Indian," I suggested mysteriously, and held out my hand for the crumpled ball, which he gave me without a word.

"Don't tell Tiscoquam," he cautioned in an undertone, and went off to find more sticks.

I lacked now but half the means of writing, and remembering the marking stones, as we children used to call hard bits of colored clay which we treasured to draw pictures with, I set about looking for one. But my search was vain. Naught but flints could I discover, and these would not serve. Yet as I hunted, the white, starlike flower of the blood-root caught my eye and I nigh cried out with joy. Here, indeed, was all the ink I needed. The juice from the stem would make a fine red mark upon my scraps of paper.

Still pretending to be on the outlook for fire-

wood, I retraced my steps along the path we had come till I was out of sight of our stopping-place. Here I halted and set to work to carry out my plan.

Little Jacky's fire-lighters had evidently been picked hastily out of the waste-basket in Mummer's office, for two of the bits were filled upon one surface with close columns of figures.

The other side, however, was blank, and plucking a blood-root I printed as quickly as I could the following message:

Tiscoquam is taking Jacky to the Seneca country to make him a great chief. I go with them. All well. Do not fear harm for the boy.

This much nigh filled my sheet and I was about to sign it "Peg" when I bethought me of a hunter or trapper finding it who knew naught of us. This determined me to use the space left for our address so I added, "For Denewood in Germantown."

There was still a little room in the lower corner, but not enough to print my name, so large was I obliged to make the letters; then remembering how many times I had used my mysterious ring to

make wax seals I rubbed some of the blood-root juice upon the cutting and stamped it upon the spot at the end of my brief note.

To my delight the design showed perfectly, and I was assured that once in the hands of any one at home there could be no doubt of who had written it.

My next task was to find a suitable place to leave my message, but as I looked about me it seemed as though one spot was as good as another, for I must trust its being found at all to a merciful Providence. I put it on a rock at my feet, placing a stone on one corner against its blowing away, and it looked so small in that vast forest that my heart misgave me lest no one would come upon it. It was plain that I must do something to attract attention to it.

By dint of hard thinking, albeit I wasted no time for fear of Tiscoquam's return, I hit upon the plan of tearing one of the other pieces of paper into bits and putting on each a blood-root seal from my ring.

This I did with all haste, dropping them at equal distances from one another on both sides of the spot where lay my little letter.

"Surely," I thought, "any one picking up a scrap of paper with so strange a marking will look for more and so be led to the place I wish them to go."

This scheme seemed so encouraging that I was about to tear up the remaining portion of my paper in order to extend the trail, but as I glanced down I saw written thereon in Mummer's crabbed script, "Overhaste churns bad butter!"

It was as if the old steward himself had spoken a warning and I thrust it into my pocket to save it, as seemed wise, against future needs.

Luckily Jacky, playing the mighty hunter most earnestly, had scarce noted my absence.

"We 'd have no firewood were it not for me," he announced, pointing proudly at the pile of sticks he had gathered.

"Where did you find so many?" I asked penitently.

"Come and I 'll show you," he answered, and I set to work with a will.

Not long after this Tiscoquam returned, and with him was an Indian woman, his squaw. Where she had been I know not, but evidently their meeting was prearranged and perhaps ac-

counted for Tiscoquam's slow pace which had permitted me to overtake him.

This woman carried a little animal of some sort and a few roots of katniss, which are not unlike turnips, and immediately she set to work to kindle the fire and prepare the food. She took no notice of Jacky or me so far as I could tell, though I doubted not she was well aware of all we did.

Tiscoquam sat for awhile watching me idly, as I thought. Presently he rose to his feet and began circling the open glade in which we had stopped, gazing intently upon the ground. As he reached the outer edge of it, he suddenly gave a grunt, looking sharply at me. Then he turned and disappeared into the wood. T' was plain he had marked my footprints and was on the track leading to the information I had left to guide those whom I hoped would be searching for us.

Nor was I wrong in my surmise, for he returned, holding in his hand my precious message and several of the smaller scraps of paper. He came running quickly and it was plain that he was excited, though with the Indian habit of suppressing emotion, he endeavored to hide his agitation. I was greatly frightened, thinking he

would seize upon this as a pretext to leave me behind, but to my surprise he went directly to the squaw, holding out for her inspection the papers I had marked. The woman, when she saw them, gave a half-stifled cry of amazement and started back, pressing her hands to her breast and lowering her head as if fearful that a blow might fall.

Presently Tiscoquam strode over to where I stood and holding out a bit of the paper with the imprint of the seal plainly visible, struck it with the forefinger of his other hand.

"Where did the pale-face maiden learn this magic?" he demanded sharply.

Now at the word "magic" I thought it wise to encourage any awe he might have on that score, and by playing on his superstitions win some consideration.

"You do well to call it magic, Tiscoquam," I said gravely, though I had not the faintest idea what all the pother was about.

"What is the portent?" he demanded, again striking the paper with his finger.

"That it bodes no good to you to keep the child and me," I returned promptly.

"Tiscoquam's heart is not turned to water even

now," he returned proudly, "but the pale-face maiden is free to go."

"I go not alone, Tiscoquam," I answered, and then noting the broad band of white paint about each of his wrists, another idea came to my mind.

Seeing a blood-root flower at my feet I leaned down, pretending to fix a shoe-latchet, but in reality smearing the stone set in my ring and now turned palm inward, with the juice from its stem. Suddenly I rose and grasped the Indian by the wrist, squeezing the seal down upon the white band.

"And by this sign," I cried, "know that evil will befall you and your race an you keep the boy and me an hour longer!"

Tiscoquam looked at the imprint on the white paint and, though an Indian brave may not show fear, he staggered back from me as if he saw a ghost.

CHAPTER IX

AN EXTRACT FROM BEE'S DIARY

MEANWHILE in Denewood many things were happening and I cannot do better than to copy a few of the pages out of Bee's diary relating to the day of Jacky's disappearance.

Bee had a book of maxims in which, from earliest childhood, she had put down her thoughts from time to time, and this led her into keeping an account of what went on in her life.

"It will amuse the children when I am a grandmother, Peg," she told me laughingly, but long ere that it proved of interest to more than one in the family.

I must stop here to say that her confidence in me was hardly deserved, but I am proud of it and glad it helped her to bear bravely those long hours of anxiety. Having said this much I shall let Bee speak for herself.

"Mrs. Mummer was the first to draw my attention to the fact that Peggy was not in the

house that morning. She came into my room all a-bustle, for she was ever busy, and looked here and there as if in search of some one.

" 'Where 's Miss Peg?' she asked a little impatiently.

" 'Is she not in her own room?' I questioned in turn.

" 'Nay; I've searched the house from cellar to eaves and no sign of her,' Mrs. Mummer replied.

" 'Mayhap she 's off to the woods with Jacky,' I suggested.

" 'Aye, that 's it,' agreed Mrs. Mummer. 'I doubt not she was sorry the lad was not let go to see the Indians. 'T is a pity his father could not have taken him to the pow-wow.'

" 'And you the one who made the most objection!' I exclaimed, remembering who had protested loudest against the boy's going.

" 'Ah, well, Miss Bee, 't is true, as Mummer says, "You cannot have the penny and the cake too;" but it goes against me not to let the lad have his way,' she explained.

"At that moment my brother Hal entered, having just ridden over from Chestnut Hill. When

he heard of the proposed council at the Indian Queen Tavern he turned on his heel.

"'I 'm off to see the redskins!' he exclaimed, for he was ever most interested in them; 'and, oh, by the way,' he went on, halting a moment, 'shall I take Jacky with me? I saw him in the woods beyond the gate. He was out hunting deer.'

"'No; his father wished him not to go. But was Peg with him?' I asked.

"'I met her later looking for him,' Hal answered. 'She 's like the rest of you women, following the boy like a hen with one chicken. You'll spoil—'

"'Where did you say you 'd met them, Hal?' I interrupted, for I had heard all that he would have said on the subject many times before.

"'About a quarter of a mile back on the Mt. Airy road,' he returned easily. 'Peg hurried off as if a bear might catch him. You 'll make a mollycoddle of the youngster, mark my words. Well, I 'm off. Good-by,' and a few moments later I heard him galloping away to see the Indians.

"'The lad was out of bounds,' said Mrs. Mummer, eying me uneasily. 'Eh, but Miss Bee dear,

ye won't punish him, will you?' she begged as if I had threatened dire consequences for this infraction of the rules. 'He 's but a baby, remember, and 't is natural he might make a mistake by accident. Promise you 'll not punish him, Miss Bee?'

" ' "Spare the rod and spoil the child," as Mummer says,' I quoted solemnly.

" 'What does a dried-up old man like Mummer know of bringing up children?' Mrs. Mummer exclaimed. 'But I 've no fear of your striking him with any rod, and I 'll not believe he was out of bounds at all. Master Hal 's mistaken,' and she flounced from the room, scandalized at the very thought of her darling being whipped.

"If it had not been that I was convinced that my own dear Peggy was with the boy I should have begun to be anxious much sooner than I did. As a matter of fact it was not till near the dinner hour that I realized that something must be amiss or the two would have returned. Distinctly worried, but by no means greatly alarmed, I sought Mummer.

" 'Have you seen aught of Master Jacky or Miss Peg?' I asked, but he shook his head.

"'No, madam,' he answered, 'but perchance some of the men have. I 'll find out.' I followed him to the farm servants' quarters and there we found a black boy who said he had met Peggy going north into the woods.

"'Why, yes, ma'am, I done seen her,' he answered. 'Miss Peggy she come along jes after I done seen the Injun back there near the upper woodlot, ma'am.'

"'Indian!' I echoed. 'What Indian?'

"'Oh, one of them chief Injuns, Miss Travers, ma'am,' he answered volubly, 'dressed up mighty fine in paint and feathers, he was, ma'am. I reckon he was gwin to the barbecue. I dun tole Missy Peg about him and she looked scandalized, but she ain't sayin' nothin'. No 'm, I ain't seen no sign of little Massa,' he ended, his eyes growing wider at the hint of trouble.

"Taking this boy and one or two others, Mummer and I hurried to the place where he had met Peg and then went on for a good mile without catching sight of her. All the while we called repeatedly at the top of our voices, but received no answer.

"By this time I was thoroughly alarmed. My

first thought was that an accident had happened to one of them, but this scarce seemed likely. Unless both had in some way come to grief we would have had word ere this. For little Jack knew every inch of the land about Denewood and could have warned us of a mishap to Peggy.

"Evidently they were lost, having doubtless become bewildered in an unfamiliar part of the forest. Even now they might be hurrying away from us, all unknowing.

"Thoroughly convinced of this, and assured of the uselessness of any further unskilled efforts to trace them, I immediately turned back, sending one of the boys ahead to find Bill Schmuck, who was as good as any Indian at following a trail. Indeed, John had often said he was better than the redskins at their own game, and I proposed to start him on the hunt without loss of time.

"He responded promptly to my summons, and when I told him what was wrong he was ready on the instant to take up the search.

" 'They 're together, Miss Bee. I 'll guarantee that,' he said. 'Otherwise one of them would be home by now. Where did Master Hal see the boy last?'

"I told him all I knew and he went off, taking two black boys with him, while Mummer and I returned to Denewood. Good Mrs. Mummer met me in the drive and one glance showed her that I had not found Peg or the boy. She had no need to ask whether I was anxious, and she was never one to waste time in talk; but she stood ready now, as she had in the past, to further any plan I might have.

" 'Mummer,' I said, as we had reached the house, 'take Charley and ride among the neighbors. You may get some word of them.'

" 'Aye, that 's well thought of,' Mrs. Mummer applauded, and her husband with a nod went off to the stables.

"The next hour dragged itself out, while I watched the roads and woods for the first sign of a returning messenger. Mrs. Mummer, scarce saying anything, stayed near me, her heart nigh as sad as mine, for she loved the boy with all the strength and devotion which she would have given a son of her own, and Peggy was as the apple of her eye. It was sore waiting. If it had not been a matter of the woods I should not have

stayed back, but now I would but hamper those who sought the trail.

"At length, as the time went by and no news came, I took thought of sending for John. This had occurred to me from the first, but it was hard for me to convince myself that aught serious had happened and I had no wish to alarm him or to bring him back to Germantown upon a needless errand, with his day spoiled for naught. Now, however, I felt that he should be advised.

" 'I 've decided to send for Master John,' I said to Mrs. Mummer.

" ' 'T is time,' she agreed. 'Shall I give the order to Peter?'

" 'Yes, please,' I answered, and then, as she started off, I checked her. 'Nay, wait. 'T would be better if Mark Powell went.'

" 'But who 's to tell Mr. Powell?' she asked, for he lived a mile or so away from us.

" 'I 'll go,' I answered. 'It will help me to do something.'

" 'Aye, dearie, that 's wise to,' she said encouragingly. 'I 'll see that your horse is saddled,' and off she went to the stables, while I ran upstairs to

put on a saveguard skirt and get my hat and gloves.

"As I came down she met me at the door.

" 'You 're my own brave girl,' she said, and took me in her arms for a moment, giving me a hug of comfort. I know of few I would rather have near me in a time of trouble than good Mrs. Mummer.

" 'If I could only understand it,' I murmured, a little brokenly. 'Peggy must be with the boy. And she 'll never let harm come to him, but by this time word might have been sent, even if she could not come herself. That 's what makes me anxious.'

" 'Miss Peggy loves the boy as we do,' Mrs. Mummer answered.

" 'If it were n't for Peg,' I cried, nigh losing control of myself, 'I—I don't know what I 'd do!' and then Peter came with the horse, and I mounted with all speed.

" 'If they come while you 're gone, dearie,' Mrs. Mummer called as I started off, 'I 'll send Peter after you.'

"It was more than a little satisfaction to me to be riding swiftly to do somewhat for the recovery

of my lost boy. Moreover, I wanted to tell Mark myself just what had happened, for I had no wish that John should have an account of the affair through one of the black boys, who was like to let imagination run away with him. Mark heard me with scarce a word, seeing at once that this was no matter to argue about. And Polly, too, behaved better than I had expected, though she was a little hysterical and hugged her own boy who could just toddle across the floor, as if he might at any moment run away.

"But there was no delay. Mark was off as quickly as he could saddle his horse, leaving word with Polly that she need not look for his return until he arrived, which would not be till Jacky was found.

"We rode out of the gate together, but there our ways parted.

" 'Don't worry more than you can help, Bee,' said Mark, trying to hearten me. 'We 'll have the boy back—and you can trust Peggy, I 'm thinking.'

" 'Yes, I 'm sure of Peg,' I answered, 'but I 'm nigh as anxious about her as I am about Jacky. Good-by.'

"Everything at Denewood was as I left it. About the time I was looking for John to reach home, Dave, one of the black boys who had been off with Bill Schmuck, came running from the woods. I saw him and was out of the house on the instant.

" 'Are they found?' I cried.

" 'No, Missy, not yet. But we found they's trail,' he panted, struggling to recover his breath.

" 'Tell me about it slowly,' I said, trying to be calm and not bustle the boy with too many questions.

" 'Yes, Missy, I 'm tryin' to tell yo' all jest like it happened.'

" 'Go on,' I urged gently.

" 'Well, Mister Bill he finds the marks of young Massa,' Dave continued, 'and then the marks of Missy Peg. Then the marks of the Injun.'

" 'The Indian!' Mrs. Mummer and I exclaimed in one breath.

" 'Yes, Missy, the Injun. That 's what I said,' he reiterated excitedly. 'First of all there was little Massa's feetprints leading back from the edge of the woods near the road. They took us right up to the Injun's. They goes on a ways to-

gether and pretty soon we finds Missy Peg's what looks as if she was a-follerin' only they ain't no more signs of little Massa's—'

" 'You mean Jacky's footprints were lost?' I interrupted, trembling with fear.

" 'Yes'm, Missy, but Mister Bill he tells me to say he 's on the track of follerin' the Injun and Miss Peggy, on'y he wants another party to come help him jes' as soon as they can. He 's waitin' for me to lead the other party back. Is Massa John come yet?' he ended, looking around, evidently taking it for granted that the master of Denewood had been sent for.

" 'He 'll be here any moment,' I told him.

" 'That 's good,' he said, with satisfaction. 'Mr. Bill he say he 'd rather have Massa John than any one else to help him. He say he 's expectin' he 'll lose the trail 'most any time now, 'cause he done come to a creek and there ain't no more signs.'

"I questioned the lad to find out if there was aught he had not told me, for I, with my slight knowledge of woodcraft could scarce make head or tail of his story, but he held to it and I could not doubt he had given his message correctly.

"'It can't mean that Peggy has left the boy?' cried Mrs. Mummer in consternation.

"'I don't know what it means,' I answered, 'but I 'm sure Peg has done the best thing for Jacky, whatever it may have cost her.'

"'I 've never doubted it,' returned Mrs. Mummer, 'but where can the dear lamb be? That 's what plagues me.'

"I made no answer to this, but sent her off to get the black boy some food against his trip back with John, whom I looked for momentarily.

"And I was not to be kept waiting long. He came with Mark, both riding at top speed, and for a moment, when he leaped from his horse and took me in his arms, I could not stay my tears. But I knew there was no time to waste on such weakness and, drying my eyes, gave him all the news I had.

"'I 'll count on Peg,' he cried, 'and on Bill Schmuck, too. Come, Mark, we must hurry after them.'

"John was not the kind to loiter, but he stopped long enough to question Dave and, instead of walking, as I expected they would have to do, they all took horses, meaning to go by road as far as

possible and so save valuable time and strength.

"I wished them a Godspeed with a full heart as they galloped away.

" 'I 'll send you news, dear, as soon as I have any,' were John's last words, and once they were out of sight I went into the house to take up my weary task of waiting.

"I would now have sent after Mummer, holding his errand useless, but the disappearance of Jacky's footprints from the trail made me wonder if perchance the boy had strayed aside and even yet might be heard from at some lonely cottage.

"It must have been near five o'clock ere Mark returned. I had not expected that he would be sent to bring the news.

" 'Have you found them?' I asked, though I knew my question answered ere it was spoken.

" 'We haven't seen them, Bee,' he replied, dismounting, 'but we picked up the trail again and this time Jacky was with them. It 's plain that Peg or the Indian had carried the boy awhile and that was the reason his footprints vanished.'

" 'Then Peg is with him still!' I exclaimed, overjoyed.

"'Yes, there's no doubt of that,' answered Mark.

"'I knew she'd never desert the child,' said Mrs. Mummer, wiping away a tear. 'My own little Peggy, bless her heart—' and she stopped, knowing that to go on would but shake the courage of us both.

"'We had a long search to find the trail after they took to the creek,' Mark explained. 'They must have waded two miles or more. But Bill spied it at last, and when I left them the track was plain enough.'

"'Why did you leave them?' I asked, for John relied so much upon Mark that I wondered at his having given up the search.

"'To tell the truth,' he answered, 'I was n't anxious to come away, but as both Bill and Captain Jack are better at that sort of thing than I, it seemed natural that I should be detailed for other duty.'

"'And what is that?' I demanded.

"'I 'm to escort you to Norristown,' Mark told me, in a tone meant to help my courage.

"'Norristown,' I repeated in wonder.

"'Aye,' he answered, 'and we 'll start at once.

You see, the track is leading in that direction. Indeed, when I left them they were a good eight miles on the way, and Captain Jack can reach you quicker there than he could at Denewood. He 'll come on himself if he finds the boy and in any event will send word of what is going forward to the Tavern to-night or to-morrow morning. He thought you would like to be as near as you could.'

" 'That I would!' I cried, realizing with a grateful heart that, through all his anxiety about our son, my husband still had a thought for my peace of mind. 'We 'll start at once.'

" 'Not till you have something to eat, Miss Bee,' Mrs. Mummer declared positively, but Mark and I wasted little time and were soon on the way to Norristown."

CHAPTER X

OUT OF THE FRYINGPAN

LEAVING Bee's diary at this point I must now tell what was happening to me after I had tried my magic upon Tiscoquam. He stood for a moment as if half stunned, gazing fixedly at the mark upon his wrist. Then recovering himself with an effort, he raised his hands, holding the fingers so that they overlapped a little and placing his outstretched thumbs against his forehead. So he remained for a full minute, his eyes cast upon the ground and his lips moving as if he murmured a prayer.

"It is a sign," he said at length, lifting his head and letting his hands drop to his sides. "It is a sign!"

His repetition of the words was so solemn that I looked for some further explanation; but on a sudden, as if he had reached a decision, he left me and strode back to the squaw, cowering beside the small fire she had kindled.

What it portended I could not guess, but I watched the two, ready to profit by anything that favored our escape.

Tiscoquam talked rapidly to the Indian woman, who seemed to offer a protest which her savage mate quickly silenced, and I doubted not from his manner that he was giving her orders even while he busied himself packing his pouch with parched corn taken from her bundle.

At length he stood ready.

"The pale-face maiden goes with Lapowissa," he called, indicating the squaw, and without another word he started off at a rapid trot and disappeared into the forest.

I could scarce say what I had expected, but my spirits drooped again as I realized that we had but exchanged one captor for another.

True, I was less afraid of the squaw and counted upon befooling her more easily than I could Tiscoquam should opportunity arise, of which I had little hope. We were quite helpless in the forest, for I knew not even in which direction Denewood lay and must, perforce, follow the Indian woman wherever she might lead.

Whatever the outcome, I thought it unwise to

show aught of hostility to our new guide, but rather the reverse, so I walked slowly toward her, trying in every way I could to appear friendly.

She was repacking her belongings in great haste, eying me furtively the while, much as though she expected me to spring upon her. Indeed, as I drew near she leaped away with such evident terror that I trembled lest she disappear into the woods, leaving us without guidance or food.

I retreated at once and was relieved when, after a moment's uncertainty, she returned and finally took up her bundle.

Inviting me to follow with a wave of her hand she hurried off in a direction opposite to that taken by Tiscoquam, yet not the way we had come.

I roused little Jack, who had dropped off to sleep and, in my alarm lest we should lose sight of the woman, picked him up in my arms and started after her.

"Set me down, Aunty Peg," he cried vigorously. "Dost think I am Baby Allen to be carted about like a sack of meal."

"Nay then," I answered meekly, "you let Tiscoquam carry you."

"I made believe he was my horse, and that I rode to hunt the deer," the boy contradicted sturdily. "Where is Tiscoquam?"

"He has gone on," I answered, "and we must hasten, lest we be left behind."

Jacky, once he was wide awake, made better going than I, who had had no rest and was hard put to it to keep up with the timid savage woman.

She shuffled ahead at a surprising rate, and the more I hurried to catch up with her the faster was the pace she set, till I began to think I should drop from exhaustion. Then it occurred to me that she had no more intention now of letting me approach her than she had had in camp. As I increased my effort to come even with her she went the faster, in order to keep me at what she considered a safe distance. Convinced of this, I began to go more slowly and was vastly relieved to find that she did the same.

In this manner we went on, while the sun sank lower and lower, till it was nigh its setting. Wearily I plodded, giving Jacky a hand now and then to help him over a fallen log, and wishing

with all my heart that we would come to the Indian camp to which I was certain we were being led.

Suddenly to my vast surprise we reached the edge of the forest and looked out upon tilled fields and a cluster of houses. The squaw, still keeping her distance, motioned me that my way lay toward the village and then, turning, with evident relief to be rid of us, she vanished into the woods as had Tiscoquam.

Unprepared for this abandonment I called after her, running to the spot where she had disappeared. But I stopped there, realizing the uselessness of attempting to follow her. What more could she do for me? It was plain now that we had been set upon our way to Denewood, whether by Tiscoquam's orders or not I could only guess, but here was a place where horses might be obtained and much time and weary walking saved.

I had no idea where we were, but however near or far it was, I was firm in my determination to reach Germantown that night. I had no mind to leave Bee a prey to anxiety a moment longer than could be helped. I knew only too well that the boy's disappearance had caused her many

hours of suffering, but I hoped that my absence had led all to conclude that I was with him, and thus afforded her a crumb of comfort.

"Come, Jacky," I cried, taking his hand and starting for the road before us, "come along. We 'll soon be home again."

"Nay, I do not wish to leave the forest," he answered, holding back sturdily. "There are no deer at home. Only cows and oxen, and those Mummer will not let me shoot. I 'll stay awhile with Tiscoquam."

"But we have n't seen so much as the tail of a deer all day," I coaxed, for I had no wish to increase my difficulties by being forced to drag a reluctant lad. "Beside," I went on, "we must find shelter for the night."

"Tiscoquam will build a lodge," he insisted.

"But Tiscoquam is far away and has taken his bow and arrows with him," I explained. "How can we kill a deer should we come upon one?"

To this he had no answer ready and although still reluctant he suffered me to lead him forward.

As we entered the little hamlet I bethought me that I should do well to ask help at one of the more substantial houses rather than be delayed by

making explanations to those who could not afford to furnish the horses I required, so, with this thought in mind, I chose a fine dwelling set a goodly distance back from the road. There was a sizable field in front, dotted here and there with great elms, and behind, a huge barn with many smaller outbuildings. The gate stood hospitably ajar so that I entered with a light heart, encouraged by the evident prosperity of the place and sure that I should meet with gentle folk who would respond promptly to my appeal.

I mounted two or three steps to the portico and lifting the knocker struck twice, listening to the dull boom of the blows echoing about the rooms inside. For a moment the hollowness of the sound gave the impression that the house was deserted, but I had little time to speculate upon this, for the door opened quite suddenly, only to be closed again with a sharp bang.

I had caught sight of the wizened, wrinkled face of a man dressed in the plain drab garb of a Quaker, but I was so surprised that I stood gaping, till a voice from within brought me to my senses.

"Thee cannot expect aught who have done

naught to earn it. So think not to fill my ears with tales of thy necessities."

Those were the words I heard spoken in a high-pitched, querulous tone such as might be used to an importunate beggar, and I confess that they angered me for the moment.

"I 'm not come to ask alms," I fair shouted, and catching again at the knocker I beat thrice upon the door with all my might.

"Mayhap thee comes to rob!" I heard the voice exclaim.

"Nay," I replied, "I 'll pay in good hard coin for any service I ask of you."

There was a moment of silence and then the door opened a crack and the wrinkled face appeared again, grinning at me, and as I returned the look it winked slyly with one eye.

"Is there any one with thee?" he asked cautiously.

"None but a little boy," I answered, "scarce big enough to fright you."

The door opened now to its full width and I saw standing before me a little old man, whose clothing, frayed and none too clean, showed anything rather than the look of prosperity I had ex-

pected. He still grinned, but I was to learn that this expression was habitual and meant none of the mirth it seemed to signify. He looked me over carefully from head to foot, then he spoke, but more to himself than to me.

"I 'll ring thy coin before I bargain," he muttered.

"I said naught of payment in advance," I retorted, still angered by his manner toward me.

"An I get no sight of the color of thee's money how am I to know 't is aught but shin plaisters?"

And indeed as I had not a penny-piece upon my person I had to admit to myself that his point was well taken. Still I had no mind to spend the night in argument, and seeing another well-kept place not far away, I decided the best thing to do, notwithstanding my fatigue, was to seek help elsewhere.

"I give you good even," I said, and taking Jack's hand started to move off.

"Hoity toity!" the man exclaimed. "I did not say I would not help thee. Be not so quick to anger. Hast never heard that overhaste churns bad butter?"

In truth I had not heard that wise saw be-

fore, but those were the words upon the piece of paper I had taken from Jacky that day, which still lay hid within my pocket. That the man should have hit upon that expression made me pause a moment in very surprise.

"I asked not to handle thy money," he went on. "I did but wish thee to show me somewhat of value to prove that thee can pay what thee promises. Thy rags are a poor testimony in thy favor," he ended sourly, and this remark made me think of my appearance for the first time.

I looked down at my dress with a feeling akin to dismay. It was in tatters at the hem, and was muddied and stained with blood-root into the bargain. My hands were black and scratched, my shoes and stockings soiled, and I doubted not my face was in like case, while my hair hung in tangles. I was not a figure to inspire confidence and the remnant of my anger dropped away, for I felt the man's suspicions in a measure were justified.

"If I can show you aught of value will you supply me with horses to take us to my cousin's in Germantown to-night?" I asked after a moment's hesitation.

"To Germantown, this night!" the old man exclaimed. "Nay now, 't is out of all reason. If thee has money why does thee not rest at the Tavern like honest folk and go forward upon thy journey by the light of day? It is a good three hours' hard riding from here over roads that are none too easy traveled in broad sun."

"I must get the boy safe home to-night," I declared stubbornly, "and I stand to haggle at no price within reason to be taken there."

"'T will cost thee double fare," he muttered after a moment of consideration, "and thee must agree that the horses and the lad shall be housed and fed at thee's expense. He hath an unchastened appetite," he added under his breath.

All that would be looked to, I assured him.

"So far so good," he answered; "but before I order the nags, I must see an earnest of thy ability to pay the shot."

Now the only thing I had of value was my precious ring which had stood me in such good stead that day, and knowing that it was worth many times any fare he might ask, I held out my hand to show it to him.

"Here is sufficient worth to buy your horses if need be," I said confidently.

He stooped and looked at the ring, then shook his head disparagingly.

"'T is naught but brass," he grunted. "Didst think thee could befool an old man's eye?"

"Nay," I retorted, angered again, "'t is of great value. If you cannot believe your eyes, try the weight of it in your hand. No brass was ever of such heaviness." And foolishly I slipped the ring from my finger and laid it upon his extended palm.

No sooner had his fingers closed upon it than he whipped back into the house and clapped to the door in my face.

CHAPTER XI

A PAIR OF KNAVES

SO bewildered was I at this sudden turn of affairs that I seemed bereft of all power to move, and stood staring at the closed door as if I could scarce believe my eyes. The unexpectedness of the man's action took me so completely by surprise that I looked at the finger upon which I was wont to wear the ring to make sure I had not dreamed it all. But the rattle of the chain barring the door brought me to my senses, and I heard the quick patter of the Quaker's retreating footsteps and a low chuckle, as if he laughed to himself.

I stepped close to the door, meaning to ply the knocker and demand the return of my property, but ere I raised my hand, I heard a muffled cry of exultation and the sound of another masculine voice expressing amazement, though I caught not the words.

Even then, in spite of the fact that I knew there

were two to deal with, I was little minded to go away and leave my ring behind me, for the day was past when a lawless soldiery robbed right and left while the victim said, "Thank you," so long as his head rested safe upon his shoulders.

But by now the voices inside were raised to a high pitch and I could hear distinctly.

"You say there was a boy with her?"

"Yea," was the reply from the old man I had seen.

"Oh, fool! fool!" came the angered exclamation, "what good is the ring without the boy? Have you forgot that there is a price upon his head? Come, we must catch them ere they 're lost to us." And as he spoke I heard heavy footsteps running along bare floors.

On the instant all thought of my ring vanished. Nor did I pause to speculate upon the cause of the man's wanting little Jack. The words I had heard left no doubt of the determined purpose behind them, and I was deeply alarmed at the menace they contained. I grasped the boy by the wrist, and rushing him down the steps of the portico, dragged him around the corner of the house even as the chain rattled at the door.

A clump of lilac bushes all a-bloom stood near, and the child, catching something of my fright, needed no warning to drop to his knees and follow me quickly beneath its fragrant shelter.

"Lie close, Jacky," I whispered, stifling as best I could the gasping of my hurried breathing.

The sun was set by this time and the fast-fading light gave me hope that we would escape detection, but I dared not think what danger might confront us if we were captured.

The clash of the door as it burst open, and the noise of heavy feet hurrying down the steps, set my heart to beating quickly, but I plucked up courage enough to raise my head and peep through the leaves. I saw a man, apparently young and fashionably dressed, running down the long path to the roadway, and behind him shuffled the old Quaker who had robbed me. At the gate the foremost figure stopped, looking eagerly to right and left, and from his gestures I judged he was greatly excited.

I watched, hoping that they would take to the highway in search of us, for I meant to cross the fields and seek a hiding-place farther away at the first chance. But they loitered near the gate for

five minutes or so, and then, to my chagrin and terror, started back toward the house, the younger man walking quickly, while the old Quaker, scarce able to keep up, hurried at his side. Near the house they stopped short and their angry words came to me clearly.

"A hoop to the barrel!" cried the younger man bitterly. "'T is the toast everywhere. You 're not worth your salt, Jasper Pilgrim, else this barrel had been naught but a bundle of rattling staves long ago."

"Can I be blamed if the States agree upon a Constitution?" demanded the Quaker, whose name I had just heard. "I did what I could in these parts, and spent the King's money as thee told me, but—"

"There 'll be no more money to spend," the other cut in violently. "The King's guineas will not be so easy come by in the future. If this constitution be passed, 't is good-by to my bread and butter,— and 't is a long way to England."

"Nay, there 's a fortune in the ring," protested the old man. "We have but to find a boy—"

"But you 've lost the boy," the other burst out wrathfully. "Who would have thought to see

you let five thousand pounds slip through your crooked fingers?"

"Thee knows I am no believer in force," whined the Quaker. "The Society of Friends—"

"Quit your cant," snarled his companion. "Dost think I do not know you for a war-time Quaker, who learned his 'thees' and 'thous' to save his pocket and his skin."

"Thee broke in upon my words," declared Jasper Pilgrim with a show of spirit. "I was saying if we could but find *a* boy of about the same age who would be the wiser when we had the ring to prove his birth?"

"Now that 's well thought of," declared the younger man musingly. "Let's see the ring," and he held out his hand.

"Nay, there 's no need for thee to trouble. 'T is safe," answered the Quaker, drawing back.

"Keep it, then," growled his companion, turning to enter the house, "but I mean to have the real boy who came with it, though I spend the night in searching. How looked the girl?"

"A saucy-faced wench," answered Pilgrim. "She was ragged enough to have come from Canada, but the Indian said naught of her."

I strained my ears for their next words, but they entered the house and I heard no more of their talk.

I had caught enough of their conversation to set me thinking. Had Tiscoquam told his tale of making Jacky a chief of the Iroquois to deceive me, and was he really in the pay of these men, who for some evil design wished to gain possession of the boy? I thought not, but what possible connection could there be between Jacky Travers and my mysterious ring, which had been in my possession since before his birth? It was many a day before those questions were answered, and at the moment I had other things to ponder over, though my head swam with the possibilities they suggested.

One thing at least was very certain. Little Jack was in peril; I had saved him from one danger only to fall into another, and it was the white men, not the savage, in whom I saw most to dread.

Now, for the time being at least, we seemed safe. There was no search made about the house, and it was evident that the two rascals had concluded that we had gone away immediately

the older man had shut the door in my face. I was beginning to wonder if we might not steal out in safety, when the younger man came from the portico and, walking rapidly, disappeared down the road. I was quite sure he had begun a search for us in the little town. After this I dared not move while it was light, so taking Jacky in my arms I sat as patiently as might be, waiting for darkness to come. The boy, worn out by the excitement and fatigue of the day, soon fell asleep; and it was all I could do, in spite of my anxiety, to keep my eyes open, for I too was feeling the strain of what I had been through.

At length, save for the afterglow in the west, the day was gone, and here and there among the dark shadows I saw the glimmer of lighted candles shining through the windows of the houses, and each of these gave me food for thought. The time had come when I must go a-knocking at another door and I sought to make my selection ere I left my place of concealment.

One difficulty lay before me. The man who had left the place might be anywhere in that little hamlet, and I dared not take the road openly for fear of meeting with him. Nor was it out of the ques-

tion that he might have set others on the watch for us, and though my reason told me he could scarce do us much harm if we met in the midst of the village, yet his voice and manner had shown so grim a determination that I dreaded to risk Jacky's falling into his hands.

Where then might I go in safety in that strange town, the very name of which I did not know?

As if in answer to my question a light showed suddenly through the window of a small house, but a little way beyond. It lay in a straight line from us and to reach it I had but to cross the fields and not go near the road at all. This suited me to perfection, and waking little Jack, who was the best of children not to have turned peevish with all he had had to endure, I cautioned him to go very quietly and we moved stealthily from under our friendly lilac bush.

While we were within hearing we picked our way with all care for fear of giving an alarm, but at length the big house and its bigger barn were dark shadows behind us and I felt free to push briskly ahead.

We climbed two or three fences and crossed one wide field that had just been plowed, but the

light gleaming brightly through the window seemed to invite us to come on.

To find the entrance we had to turn the corner of the cottage, and out of sight of the friendly light, I knocked anxiously, wondering what my summons would bring this time. But in a moment my fears were put at rest, for the door opened and there, holding aloft the candle, was a stout, motherly-looking woman, not unlike Mrs. Mummer, although so big was she, that she would have made two of her, or any other female. However, she appeared most kindly and seemed to radiate happiness and comfort. Indeed at sight of her I nigh wept out of very thankfulness, for here was one upon whom I felt I could rely to do her best for me.

"Oh, please," I faltered, "won't you help me to get this boy home to his mother?"

"Aye, to be sure I will!" she answered heartily. "How comes it he was not tucked up 'twixt sheets an hour since? But don't ye answer, dearie; you 're tired. I can see it on you, and there 'll be time a-plenty. Come ye in."

"Oh, thank you!" I exclaimed, cheered by her hearty comforting words, "but I must get to Ger-

mantown to-night, and I must start at once. You see the boy's mother will be half-crazed at the loss of him."

"Ah, deary me, the poor mother!" she cried in sympathy; "but Germantown is a weary way from this village of Norristown and 't will take time to get ready."

"Are we in Norristown?" I asked, for if this were true we were a good baker's dozen miles from Denewood.

"Aye," she answered, "but come ye in. You 'll be in need of a sup of something against your journey."

We followed her into the house and Jacky at least took kindly to her suggestion of supper.

"I should like some ginger-cake," he said cheerfully. "A big piece. I 'm hungry."

"And ye shall have," exclaimed the woman, beaming upon him. "But how knew ye I baked a loaf this day?"

"I smelled it," Jacky explained promptly, at which she gave a great laugh which had the effect of making me too feel cheerful. But I was neither conscious of hunger nor really interested in anything outside of getting back to Denewood.

I was nigh at the end of my endurance and felt that I must keep all the strength I had left fixed upon that one object. I dared not, for my peace of mind, dwell upon Bee and her anxiety, but I still meant to get the boy back to her just as soon as I could accomplish it.

"Can you send us to Germantown to-night, ma'am?" I asked, as I followed her into the neat kitchen.

"To be sure," she answered readily, and then shouted at the top of her lungs, "Otto! Otto!" I judged the one she called must be far away, but to my surprise, a shock of red hair protruded slowly through the doorway of an adjoining room and the face of a boy came into view. It reminded me of a tortoise sticking its head out of a shell.

"Ya, mommie," said the head, pleasantly, giving me a merry wink.

"Was ye there all this while?" demanded the woman.

"Ya, mommie," the boy answered, grinning and winking at me rapidly.

"Then take yourself off to Mrs. Truebread and

tell her I want the loan of her saddle. I 'm for Germantown."

"So!" exclaimed the boy, his eyes widening, "und where ist your own saddle?"

"Now ain't he stupid?" she remarked, turning to me with a gesture of hopelessness, while Otto continued to grin and wink. "But he can't help it. He 's sort of Pennsylvania Dutch, if he is my own son and I pure Scotch on my mother's side." Then to the boy. "If I take my saddle, what 's the young lady to ride? Off with you now to Mrs. Truebread and come not back without a saddle or I take a besom to you."

"Ya, mommie," replied the boy good naturedly, "but I t'ought you 'd ride bodkin," and, still grinning, he withdrew his head slowly turtle-wise.

"And break the horse's back," snorted his mother, "with my eighteen stone!"

Meanwhile as she talked she had set out supper for us, with a plentiful supply of fine ginger-cake and a big pitcher of sweet milk, but though I was glad to see Jacky eat his fill, and found him the better for it, I could in no wise choke down even a small portion of the food, though the woman

coaxed me, giving much good advice against the fatigue of the coming journey on an empty stomach. I tried, but I could not swallow, and at last, seeing my vain endeavor, she stopped her urging.

"Then if ye 'll not eat, I 'm sure you 'll feel better for a bit of tidying up," she said finally, and this suggestion I hailed with pleasure, though it seemed to make some explanation of my dishevelled condition necessary.

I told her somewhat of our adventures during that long day, and she listened with exclamations of wonder here and there, and at the end gave me much praise of my fortitude; but of the ring I had said nothing, accounting for our escape from Tiscoquam by the remark that the Indian had evidently changed his mind, finding us not worth the trouble we would bring upon him.

When my face was washed and my hair smoothed a little, I felt distinctly better, but I was in no mood to delay our going, and when Otto suddenly popped into the kitchen, showing me his full, gangling length, I was overjoyed at his announcement that the horses were ready.

But the woman was not for going forth un-

prepared. She doled out garments for me against the cold of the night air, and much to Jacky's disgust, insisted that he wear a long, knitted muffler, which she wrapped and folded about him till he looked like a cocoon. For herself, she put on a great homespun cloak and at length was ready.

She mounted by the block while Otto held her horse and then, taking little Jacky up in front, bade me mount also. Otto held my stirrup and a moment later we had passed out of the circle of light from the lanthorn and were moving slowly along a path toward the road.

My heart felt easier. At last we were homeward bound with the seeming assurance that we would arrive at Denewood. The horse under me was a stout one, and, though Norristown was far from Germantown, we should reach there ere midnight, and Bee would have her boy again.

We turned into the highway and soon approached the house where I had lost my ring, but I had ceased to feel fear; rather was I angry that the sham Quaker had robbed me of it. I was in two minds about broaching the subject to the good woman beside me; but seeing that I knew the

man's name and where he lived, I resolved to keep my own counsel.

As we passed I looked across the field to the irregular shape of the buildings, showing like a silhouette against the sky. I meant to visit that house upon the morrow with one who would brook no fooling.

"I wonder will he slam the door in John Travers' face?" I thought with a smile, and then added almost aloud, "I 'll have my ring again, Jasper Pilgrim."

But as we left the place behind us the fire of my resentment died quickly and I began to realize how weary was my body. The woman beside me chatted pleasantly about this or that, but I scarce heeded her. My head swam strangely and it was all I could do to keep my saddle. I began to wonder if my strength would hold out till I reached Denewood, and was forced to summon all my fortitude and determination to see the matter through.

Presently we left the little town and turned in the direction of home and I saw ahead two dim figures on horseback approaching us. But I cared not, having scarce sufficient interest to pull

my horse to one side behind my companion in order to clear half the road.

We were moving at a foot pace as we came abreast of the strangers, and to my surprise they reined in their horses.

"Your pardon," called a man's voice in the darkness, "but we are looking for a young girl and—"

His sentence was never finished, for I knew in a moment who it was that spoke.

"Mark! Mark!" I cried. "I 'm here."

"Oh, Peggy, is Jacky with you?" exclaimed Bee, who was the other figure, and even at that instant of joyous recognition I realized with horror how near we had been to passing each other and never knowing it.

But this was only a fleeting shadow. I was overwhelmed with the sense of joy and thankfulness that the boy was safe at last.

"Yes, he 's here, Bee," I answered, and I saw Mark jump from his horse and come to my side.

"Sure, he 's here, ma'am," the woman called, and I heard Jacky himself call, "Mover!" rather sleepily, then everything became jumbled in my head.

It must have been because I was so exhausted that I let myself go, when at last all was well. That is the only way I can explain how it came about that I, who had never fainted before in my life, suddenly felt my senses slipping from me, and toppled off my horse into Mark's arms. My responsibility was at an end. Mark was there to take care of us. Bee had Jacky back again—and what I wanted most was to go to sleep.

The next I knew I was flat on my back at the side of the road lying on Bee's riding-cloak and she was bending over me with one arm around Jacky.

"I 'll go and find a coach, Bee," I heard Mark saying.

"The Tavern is but a short way back," the woman cut in. "Stay you here and I 'll return and send something after you to carry the child. Sure, she 's just wore out, poor dear. She 'll be none the worse on the morrow."

"Nay, I can ride," I protested feebly. "What is the pother?" and I tried to get to my feet.

"Lie still, Peggy dear, you—"

"No, Bee," I broke in, my mind still fixed on

one purpose, "I must get to Denewood," and this time I did sit up. "I can ride, Bee, indeed I can!" But truth to tell I felt weak and silly, and had no more strength than a baby.

Nevertheless I made shift to sit my horse, with Mark riding beside to balance me and we were soon at the Tavern in Norristown, for even to me it was plain by that time that I could not ride home that night.

Mark secured us rooms, and they helped me to one that was next Bee's, where, after taking off my shoes, I flung myself upon the bed, too exhausted to make further efforts at undressing.

There were a thousand questions I wished to ask, and I doubt not Bee had as many on her tongue, but when I would have spoken she silenced me, saying that there would be plenty of time for all that on the morrow; so, worn out by my adventures, I let my head drop upon the pillow with a sigh of thankfulness.

How long I slept I know not, but, on a sudden, I found myself broad awake, with a guilty feeling that I had left something undone. I lay still a minute puzzling over it, when in a flash I remembered what it was I had neglected.

Bee had not been warned of Jasper Pilgrim and his evil companion who threatened little Jack. She could not guess the danger, and with a feeling of apprehension I leaped out of bed and pattered across the floor, meaning to go at once to her room.

Opening the door leading to the hallway I peered forth. Showing like a shadow against the light of a window at the end of the passage, I saw the crouching figure of a man holding his ear to the keyhole of Bee's room.

CHAPTER XII

INTO THE FIRE

STRANGE as it may appear under the circumstances, my first feeling at sight of the man in the hallway was not fear but indignation. I thought not at all of danger, and stepped boldly into the hall to rebuke him. And this was my undoing, for as I crossed the threshold, and ere I had time to make a sound, a shawl was thrown over my head and I was pressed back against the wall.

"Hold her hands," was whispered, in the voice of the man who had been with Jasper Pilgrim that afternoon, and then I knew upon what errand this pretty pair of rogues were bent.

I felt my arms pinioned behind me and the shawl wrapped tight about my head till I was nigh smothered.

"Keep her fast till I find the boy," came the next whisper, and the first man released his grasp.

Though I could not cry out I began to struggle fiercely to get one of my hands free. Bart, my brother, used to say, that I was as strong as most boys of my years, and slippery as an eel, but however that was, the one who tried to hold me was not equal to the task and, in a moment, I had wrenched one arm loose from his grip and torn the shawl away from my face. In the dim light I made out that it was Jasper Pilgrim with whom I battled.

"Mark! Mark! Help!" I shouted at the top of my voice, repeating the cry again and again.

At that I heard the door to my room softly close, and the Quaker loosed his clutch upon me with a cry of fright, just as Mark appeared fully dressed, save for his coat and neckcloth.

"Where are you, Peg?" he shouted, scarce able to see in the darkness of the hall.

"Go to Bee," I answered, in an agony of suspense; "there 's a man after Jacky."

He did as I bade him without demanding explanation and I was assured that danger in that quarter had been averted when I heard Bee's voice in answer to his knock.

Meanwhile Jasper Pilgrim, seeing his exit to-

"For the moment, I could neither see nor speak"

ward the stairway blocked by Mark, had cowered against the wall and now started to run for it. I, however, excited and angry at this new outrage, snatched at him, meaning to stay him if I could, but I only managed to set one hand on some part of his clothing. At once I realized that within my clenched fist I grasped a hard object and I fastened upon it, convinced that it was my own ring I felt beneath the cloth.

He snarled at me to let him go, striking a feeble blow or two at my arm, but I held the tighter, determined not to lose my property a second time, now that it was actually within my grasp.

We struggled thus an instant, and then, amid the sharp noise of ripping stitches, the man gave a furious wrench of his body, which dragged me a step or two across the floor, and tore him free. But in so doing he left behind a handful of cloth which I still gripped.

By this time there was a great hubbub below and the sound of people running up the stair. Bee had opened her door and stood there, holding the boy in her arms, a riding-cloak thrown over her night-rail and I ran to her, as Mark started to come to my aid.

It had all taken but a moment or two, and by the time Bee had an arm about me, the landlord and his servants came hurrying up to us to know what all the commotion was about.

There was a deal of chattering, but at last I made them understand that there was an intruder in my room. With a rush they all made for the door, only to find it locked. There being no other way in, they were forced to send for a master-key and, in the meantime armed themselves against an attack with pokers, mops and whatever lay handy.

A very formidable crowd it looked when at last the door was open and they rushed into the room to a light held high by the nightcapped wife of the landlord; but there was no one there. The room was empty and in a moment they all turned to me for an explanation.

"How now, missy?" asked the landlord. "There 's ne'er a one here. Were ye not dreaming, mayhap?"

"Mayhap the door locked itself on the inside!" I burst out, angered at his stupidity; but, for all that, the room was empty.

However, the explanation was not far to seek. An open window led on to the roof of a shed, and though 't was steep, it was no great trick to escape to the ground. The man was gone, but had the door not been locked I know the landlord would still have insisted I had but dreamed. As it was, two or three of the servants shook their heads, eying me dubiously.

" 'T was doubtless some boy's prank," the landlord said, as we all came back into the hall and there was a general murmur of assent among the others.

"I 'd scarce call Jasper Pilgrim a boy," I retorted, and at this there were loud exclamations of surprise.

"Jasper Pilgrim!" echoed the landlord. "Na, na, missy. He 'd ne'er have the courage to jump from yon shed roof."

"But 't is the other one did that," I insisted. "Jasper Pilgrim held me, while—"

"Nay, you must be mistook," the landlord cut in sharply. "Jasper is a Quaker, and though no what ye 'd call free wi' his money he 's no up to such tricks as these."

"'T is useless to argue it, Peg," Bee interposed. "Come in and tell us about it. There 's little danger of their coming back to-night."

With a chuckle here and there among the crowd, showing plainly that they took the attack upon us lightly, they moved off, while we went into Bee's room and closed the door upon them.

Then it was that I told all my experiences that day and how I had come to fear Jasper Pilgrim and his companion. They heard me with scarce an interruption, though now and then Bee put an arm around me and hugged me close, vowing I had saved her boy. Both she and Mark remembered Tiscoquam and seemed to appreciate the motives that had prompted his taking little Jack, but why a strange old man in Norristown should wish to steal the boy they could in no wise comprehend, though the danger, they saw, was real enough.

"'T is indeed scarce credible," Bee exclaimed at the end.

"I 'd like to catch the old thief," Mark murmured angrily. "I 'd see to it that he did n't steal any more rings."

"But what have you there, Peggy dear?" Bee

asked, and I looked down at my lap where my hand lay, still clutching a portion of Jasper Pilgrim's clothing.

"Oh, I 'd clean forgot," I cried. "The ring is here, I believe," and I unfolded a piece of cloth, which was evidently a portion of the old Quaker's waistcoat, for there was a small pocket in it.

I unbuttoned this and drew forth the hard object I had fastened upon so tenaciously. To my surprise it was wrapped in a bit of paper from a news-sheet, but, as I had guessed, it was my ring.

" 'T is found, Bee!" I exclaimed, handing it to her.

She took the ring, and in idle curiosity I looked at the wrapping in my hand. For a moment the printed words scarce separated themselves before my eyes. Then suddenly I took in the purport of them.

"Bee!" I exclaimed, "listen to this," and I read aloud as follows:

"5000 Pounds Reward for the recovery of a boy, aged about seven years, and The Ring With a Reson which he wore about his neck, hung on a chain. The ring carried a device of

a Cupid with a drawn bow cut upon the sapphire stone in the bezel, and is set with five triangular diamonds. For further particulars call upon Andrew M'Sparren in Nassau Street in the City of New York. Mch. 3rd. 1786."

"Now that 's plain enough!" exclaimed Mark. "They think that because Peg has the ring, Jacky must be the boy named in the notice."

"That must be it," Bee agreed. "But what is a reson? Is it on your ring or was it also on the chain about the child's neck?"

"I don't know," I replied doubtfully, "and what has Tiscoquam to do with it? When he saw the device upon the ring he let Jacky go."

"That I cannot even guess," Bee admitted, "but Mark is right. Your Jasper Pilgrim and his companion evidently think Jacky the missing child."

"Jacky 's but five while the lost boy is seven, according to this," I argued, indicating the paper.

"Jacky is monstrous large for his years," Bee explained with pride, "and you heard the Quaker himself say any boy who looked the age would do, so long as they had the ring which would seem to prove his birth."

"There 's no doubt of it," Mark repeated positively, "and I shall have to escort you home in the morning. They are a bold pair of villains."

"Yes, I would n't dare go alone now," Bee agreed.

"And must I walk?" I asked plaintively.

"No, you must go to bed," Bee laughed quietly. "We arranged with the good woman who took you in last night to come early on the morrow with horses. She looks as if she would be as good as another man if we met our enemies. Now we must try to get some rest and I think Mark had best stay in the next room, while you must share this one with Jacky and me."

So once more we settled down to sleep and though the night was not as far gone as I had first supposed when I woke so suddenly, there were but a few hours left ere the sun would be up.

Daylight found me quite refreshed and after breakfast I was as strong as ever and none the worse for my adventures.

My friend of the night before came betimes with the horses, her honest, smiling face lighting

up as she saw me and reminding me more than ever of Mrs. Mummer.

Ere we started I took Mark aside and gave him my ring to keep, for it had been stripped of the thread that had served to make it fit my finger.

"I wonder you trust me with it," Mark laughed, as he slipped it into an inner pocket.

"Would Polly not trust you?" I asked half-jestingly.

"Nay, that she would n't," he answered. "She 's told me so often that I lose everything that I begin to believe it myself. I shall be glad to be rid of this troublesome ring when we reach Denewood."

"Well, in that case," I said with pretended anxiety, "you 'll please put it at once in the little powdering-box on my dressing table, if by chance I am not ready to take it from you."

"Do you mean to go a-gossiping upon the way?" he inquired banteringly. "Were I you I would change my dress before visiting, unless fringe is now the fashion."

We left a letter with the landlord for Cousin John or any of his men, and took the road, Mark

at Bee's side and I following with the good woman who, though she seemed rather silent, was ever ready with her kindly smile.

It was a fine day, but the going was none too good and we made slow progress. Jacky, sitting in front of Bee, chatted gaily, and wished he might meet Tiscoquam, ever thinking of that deer to be shot, and Bee was too delighted to have him back to say a chiding word.

We soon left the little hamlet behind us and our road wound through virgin forest with only occasional spaces of cleared land, where the settlers' houses nestled close to the road for company. We met one or two carters and gave them "good morning," but for the most part we saw naught save rabbits and birds.

We were a good half way on our journey when my companion checked her horse and looked down at its front foot. Instinctively I did the same without saying aught to Bee or Mark, who continued on their way, not knowing even that we had halted.

"What is it?" I asked, and she muttered something I did n't catch, still looking down.

"What is it?" I repeated, and this time she raised her head, gazing however at the two in front rather than at me.

"I thought he 'd picked up a stone," she said, and started on again.

This action had put fair two hundred yards between us and those ahead, but there was naught to cause me to think twice of this and I would not have remembered the circumstance save that at the moment Bee and Mark crossed a bypath running at right angles to the main road, I heard a shout, and instantly there rushed between us two mounted men whom I recognized at once. One was Jasper Pilgrim and the other his rascally companion.

I glanced at the woman by my side, expecting to see some evidence of surprise or fright on her countenance but of these I found no trace and a sudden suspicion flashed into my mind.

"Who are you?" I cried, leaning forward and grasping her by the shoulder.

"I am Jasper Pilgrim's lawfully wedded wife," she answered, looking guiltily at the ground. "He 's the man I promised to love, honor and obey."

CHAPTER XIII

AN UNEXPECTED SITUATION

THE instant the woman beside me announced that she was the wife of Jasper Pilgrim I saw that we had been tricked, and this revelation, added to the sudden appearance of the two men, struck me dumb with surprise. Then recollecting that neither Bee nor Mark had, so far as I then knew, ever seen the pair before, I was about to shout a warning. But there was no need. Bee had taken the alarm and, with a cry of fear, spurred her horse and galloped rapidly down the road.

Almost at the same moment Jasper Pilgrim's companion, urging his animal to a rapid gait, swerved past Mark and took after her. Mark, with a shout of anger, started in pursuit, and the Quaker followed less recklessly.

All this had taken but a moment and I sat there watching as if I had naught to do with it, so com-

plete was my astonishment. Then I came to my senses and lifted the reins, digging my heel into my beast to start him off, but though he stirred restlessly he would not go forward.

"Go on," I cried, slapping his side with my free hand again and again, but he held his ground, tossing his head nervously.

"Nay, dearie," came the voice of Mrs. Pilgrim, "he 'll not budge till I give the word. So 't is useless to beat him."

"Then make him start," I cried, exasperated at the delay, for already those in front of us were growing smaller in the distance and I saw that a bend in the road would soon hide them from me.

"I will an ye give me that ring," she said, half defiantly.

"That ring!" I echoed; "what have you to do with the ring?"

" 'T is the one you stole from my wedded husband," she replied, not having the hardihood to meet my eyes, which, I doubt not, were blazing with anger.

"Stole?" I repeated. "You know I never stole a ring from any one!"

"Ah, dearie," she whimpered, "I was sure you did naught of the kind, but Jasper vowed ye had it, and what can I do but obey him? Did I not promise it in the church?"

"How comes it then that I find you in one house and your husband in another?" I asked, though I had slight interest in the matter, not seeing how the knowledge would serve me.

"We live in the cottage while the other house is rented to a foreign gentleman," she explained readily enough.

"I would that I had known that an hour ago," I told her plainly. "I little thought that a woman who seemed so kindly and honest would lend herself to such a scurvy trick. You have deceived us."

"Nay, missy, I am an honest woman," she insisted with a show of resentment.

"Then tell the horse to go on," I demanded, beginning again to urge the beast.

"The minute you give me the ring," she returned stubbornly.

"But I have it not," I cried, wildly belaboring the animal in my frantic efforts to make him go, for those ahead had disappeared around the bend

in the road and I was half mad with anxiety to know what was happening.

"He said ye had it," Mrs. Pilgrim maintained stubbornly.

"He was mistaken," I said, for all answer. "So we might as well be going on as to stand here."

"Don't tell me ye have n't the ring, missy," she pleaded with deep concern in her voice; "don't say ye have n't got it."

"But I do say it," I retorted. "Think you I 'd risk having it stolen a second time?"

"Then we must be goin' on," she said sadly. "It goes again' me, but we must be goin' on."

"Hurry then," I urged, for I was in a fever to start.

Mrs. Pilgrim rode her horse close to mine and, seizing my rein near to the bit, she spoke to the animal. Like a lamb it moved forward at a brisk walk, but this was not a pace to suit me under the circumstances.

"We must go faster, Mrs. Pilgrim," I exclaimed. "I must see what has happened to Madam Travers. Hurry now!"

"Nay, we 'll get there fast enough," she an-

swered, and by this we were come to the by-path out of which her husband had appeared. Not till we arrived here did I have a thought that the woman's purpose was other than to obtain the ring by hook or by crook. Now, however, instead of going straight on we turned sharp to the right into a grass-grown road which was little more than a lane through the woods.

"Where are you taking me?" I demanded, dragging at the rein I held, which brought the horse to a halt.

"'T is this way we're to go," she answered, and then, half-sobbing, "Oh, missy, don't blame me. 'T is his orders and I promised to obey."

"What do you mean?" I asked, puzzled at her manner, for she seemed as reluctant as I to go forward with the business.

"I was ordered to get the ring," she replied, "and failing that to take you to a place I know of. 'T is a clean, wholesome house, that I 'll promise ye and you 'll be as comfortable as in your own home, I doubt not." She said this last with a half-hopeful smile of conciliation.

"I shall not go," I answered angrily.

"Don't say that," she begged sorrowfully;

"'t will do no good to fight, for go you must," and she spoke to my horse again, at which it ambled on.

For a few moments there was silence between us, while I puzzled to get at the woman's purpose in separating me from the others. I doubted not her power to do this, for I was no match for her if it came to a physical struggle of any kind, and moreover I had no mind for such an encounter. I was not afraid. I could not lose the ring because Mark had it, and though I might be caused a few hours of discomfort and some anxiety on Bee's account, I thought that, at the worst, I would but be detained until Pilgrim returned and I convinced him that I did not possess the trinket he sought so persistently.

But Mrs. Pilgrim herself seemed not to like the business any better than I, for, as we rode along, she repeated to herself again and again under her breath, "I promised at church to obey," and seemed in anything but a cheerful frame of mind.

Soon I ceased to dwell on her situation or on my own. How Bee and the boy fared was much more important, and I worried myself into a fever of anxiety wondering what might be the

outcome of the race I had seen started. When they had disappeared their positions were unchanged, except that Jasper Pilgrim had been somewhat distanced. But though I felt sure that, man to man, Mark could easily protect Bee from the scoundrel who followed her, any accident might end the matter seriously. The roads were somewhat rough for such fast riding, and should either Bee's or Mark's horse fall, the result might be disastrous.

Yet there was naught that I could do but say a little prayer in my heart for their safety.

Mrs. Pilgrim still held the rein of my horse, and together we picked our way through the forest for two good hours. The country through which we passed was strange to me, and the lane twisted here and there till I could not have told whether we were faring toward Norristown or Germantown. We saw but one person on the way and that but a boy, herding two forlorn cows which ran into the woods at sight of us, the boy following with many vain shouts at them to stop.

Presently upon our right we came upon a broad cleared stretch of perhaps an hundred

acres, divided into pasture and tillage, and looking prosperous enough, though by no means a rich estate.

Set in a clump of maples was a sizeable house with a low second story, containing, as I found later, two small rooms. Several barns and outbuildings surrounded it and altogether it had the appearance of a well-cared for farm, inhabited by thrifty people.

"'T is there we stay," Mrs. Pilgrim announced, when we came in sight of the place.

"Whose house is it?" I asked.

"It belongs to that Dutch woman, Mrs. Schneider," she replied impatiently. "She 's one I can't abide, and that 's a fact."

"I have no wish to stop with her," I said irritably, for the whole proceeding made me cross, and Mrs. Pilgrim's half reluctant and yet determined way of going through with the affair was harder to bear than if she had been straightforwardly plotting with her husband. It seemed to me that she was trying to retain her honest reputation while helping all she could in a most unsavory transaction.

"Nay, 't is not a place you 'd be wishful to stop

at, that I know," said Mrs. Pilgrim in answer to my last remark. "She 's not one I 'd trust with a shilling, though there 's some say she 's as honest as the day is long."

I thought this came with a very bad grace from her, but it would serve no good purpose to point it out to her, so I held my peace.

We had been approaching the house from one side and came at length to a highroad that ran before it, whence we entered a short driveway, and drew rein before the stoop, which had old-fashioned settles on either side.

A dog, barking furiously, served to make our arrival known, for we had scarce halted our horses when a pink-faced German woman appeared. She greeted us in her native language (of which I knew not a word), and seemed not at all surprised at our arrival, but rather as if she had expected us.

She called loudly in the direction of one of the barns, and a boy came promptly to take the animals. Meanwhile, Mrs. Pilgrim, much to my surprise, was talking volubly to Mrs. Schneider in her own language, and from the tone of her voice and the rather commiserating glances the

latter cast in my direction I should have said she was very sorry for me. But this I put down to imagination, for I saw no good reason why I should elicit Mrs. Schneider's sympathy.

We were led into the house, which for cleanliness would have done credit to Mrs. Mummer herself, and I sat down on a chair that the German woman with a gesture of invitation had pointed to. She smiled pleasantly at me, and from her face I should have said no more honest woman lived in the land; but then I would have thought the same of Mrs. Pilgrim. I did not smile in return, for I was in no mood to seem pleased with this business she was ready to lend a hand to.

However my glumness in no way affected her and she bustled about the kitchen while she talked incessantly to Mrs. Pilgrim. Now and then a glance cast in my direction made we aware that I held a place in their conversation, and always there was a dropping of the voice that hinted at regret for something.

I sat as still as I was able, caring naught what happened so long as the time would go by to bring at last Jasper Pilgrim or his doubtful com-

panion. I had never thought to want to see either of these men, but I now knew I should be kept prisoner till they appeared and that from them would come my first news of what had happened to Bee and little Jack.

Whilst I waited, dinner was prepared by Mrs. Schneider and two stout girls whom I judged to be her daughters. They came in a little after us, and when their glance fell upon me I noted their stares of curiosity and one nudged the other, saying something in German, which was answered by a look of pity and a sad shake of the head, much after the mother's manner. Also I observed that they held themselves aloof, keeping as far away from me as was possible in that room. Indeed, when they brought me my food they drew off in haste as if perchance I might bite them.

My dinner was served on a small stand apart. This I took at the time to be a mark of respect, but later I found that 't was naught of the sort. Even then, I could n't understand the way those girls acted, but I had too many other things to concern myself with to care much about them.

At the ringing of a huge bell outside, two farm

hands came in and all sat down to their dinner, paying little heed to me, though I was sure that both Mrs. Schneider and Mrs. Pilgrim were well aware of my every action, which I put down to their fear that I might attempt to escape.

They were in the midst of the meal when the dog began again to bark, and one of the men went out at once by the yard door. Then I heard the sound of some one talking querulously and in a moment Jasper Pilgrim entered alone.

He was dusty and rather disheveled, but as his eye lit upon me it brightened vindictively and his twisted, wrinkled smile broadened on his evil face. At his entrance I rose and went toward him.

"Did you catch them?" I cried in great eagerness.

"Nay, but we 've got *thee!*" he snarled in answer, and then, greatly to my surprise, he leaped away from me as if in fear. "Stay where thee is," he shouted, and, so startling was his action, that I stopped in my tracks.

For the moment I cared for naught but the glad news that Bee was safe. By this time,

wherever the other man was, I was quite sure my dear ones were well protected at Denewood.

"So you did n't catch them!" I exclaimed, making no effort to hide my smiles. Then at his expression of anger and chagrin I laughed outright, so happy in the thought of Bee's escape that I considered not at all the fact that this old man still had me in his power—but as I laughed all the people at the table leaped suddenly to their feet and stared at me. And Jasper Pilgrim took a step nearer to me.

"Where is that ring?" he demanded.

"I have it not," I answered, but added foolishly, "though had I it, I would never give it up to you!"

Still with his sinister grin on his face, his eyes narrowed till they were mere slits under his heavy brows.

"Will thee not?" he snapped. "I tell thee, girl, thee shall not leave this house until I have the ring and the child!"

"I can give you neither," I replied steadily, but I confess the man's threat alarmed me for the first time.

He turned from me and, speaking rapidly in German, addressed Mrs. Schneider. She listened, shaking her head as if unwilling; and glancing at me as before, then coming to my side, she smiled pleasantly, and motioned me toward a door at the rear of the room.

Taking this as an invitation to accompany her, I shook my head vigorously.

"Tell the woman I shall not go with her," I said to the Quaker.

"Ah, dearie," cried Mrs. Pilgrim, much distressed, as I could plainly see, "go with her. If not they 'll force ye. Ye 'd better go peaceable."

"What does it all mean?" I demanded, a little bewildered.

"It means thee stays here till I have the ring," exclaimed Jasper Pilgrim in a harsh, high-pitched voice of anger. "Does thee understand?"

"But how can I give what I have not?" I repeated.

Again he addressed Mrs. Schneider and once more she motioned toward the door.

"Go with her, dearie," Mrs. Pilgrim urged again plaintively; "can't ye see you 're bound to go?"

I looked about and, counting six people against me, saw naught for it but to follow the German woman who took me to the door, which upon being opened revealed a flight of stairs. Up this she motioned me to lead the way, while she followed, lifting an iron key hanging from a hook in the jamb.

At the top two rooms, side by side, faced me. Mrs. Schneider gave me no time to look about but ushered me into one of them at once.

It was a small room, clean enough, but except for a bed, a stool and a chair, empty of furniture. At one end was a window toward which I walked as I went in.

Behind me I heard the door close and the key turn in the lock.

I was a prisoner.

CHAPTER XIV

MY WORD OF HONOR

FOR a while after the key was turned on me I could scarce help giving way to a feeling of despair. The thought of being shut up in that little room for I knew not how long, filled me with horror and I had to keep myself well in hand or I should have beaten upon the door in a panic. But I could not keep back the tears, and for a time I sat in the chair by the window, crying as if my heart would break.

And yet I felt no great fear. I was sure that sooner or later I must be set free and that, at worst, I had but to wait till those at Denewood found me, for I had no doubt they would be out hunting as soon as it could be arranged. Nevertheless I acted like a baby for a time.

At length I dried my tears and plucked up my courage.

"They can't eat you, Peggy Travers," I murmured, trying to talk myself into a better spirit.

"If they won't free you, sure a great girl like you should be able to get yourself out." And that gave me something to think about, which is the best help in the world to cheer a body up.

Naturally my first study was the window. Could I escape by it? I feared not. In the first place the room was upon the second floor and there was no shed roof to ease the descent, naught between the sill and the ground. However, it was not so high that I would not have risked dropping could I have climbed through, but three stout iron bars set into the stones of the sill made that impossible.

The door was my next consideration and it needed only a glance at the stout oak from which it was fashioned to show me the uselessness of trying to force it. I turned from it to look at the walls and ceiling, which were of plaster, and though cracked here and there and far from white, showed no way of escape. As I went back to my chair by the window I suddenly felt very sure that I was not the first who had been imprisoned in that little room.

But I did n't mean to yield to despondency a second time, and sat puzzling my head over the

situation till my eye caught the plaster at the lower end of the iron bars. It was plain enough that it had been put there to hold them in place and if it could be loosened it seemed not unlikely that one of the metal rods might be taken out.

I looked at the mortar eagerly and was pleased to find that it appeared old; but picking at it with my finger I could make no impression on it. What I needed was something stronger with which to dig it away a little at a time.

Then I bethought me of my pack-pocket which contained a small housewife with a tiny pair of scissors. In a moment I had these out and in another moment had snapped one of the blades off short. The mortar was too hard for such brittle metal.

Next it occurred to me to try a hairpin. Feverishly I plucked one from my hair, but here again I failed; for the plaster resisted all attempts and the pin bent in my fingers.

I searched my pocket for a better instrument, but found naught but a piece of paper. Opening this these words met my eyes: "Overhaste churns bad butter." I remembered saving it the

day before and wondered again if that short sentence had some special meaning for me. It seemed as if it had, and I put the message back, resolved to take further thought upon my plans of escape.

One thing at least was plain, the day was no good time to get away, and should I be discovered working at the bars of my window, measures would undoubtedly be taken to defeat my purpose. I must curb my impatience and wait for the night at least.

From my seat at the window side I could hear many sounds of the work going on below and had a sight of the barns and outhouses at the back. Now and then one of the farm hands would appear upon some errand, and the doves circling about their cote, and the wandering chickens, afforded me amusement while the hours passed. Also I could see the road leading to the stables, though as none came that way and as I heard no sound of passing horsemen or carts it was evidently a deserted part of the country.

As the shadow lengthened far past the noon-mark cut in the window-sill I expected a visit from Jasper Pilgrim, but he did not appear, and

I began to wonder if he had departed. I hoped so, for with him gone I might be able to secure my release, either by convincing Mrs. Schneider that she had no right to hold me, or perchance by bribing one of the men.

This last thought was in my mind when a well-looking fellow, whom I had not seen before, came into the yard, leading a tired horse. He stopped to water the beast not far off and, as he waited there, he turned his face and looked directly at me. In an instant I was on my feet, beckoning him to come under the window.

He seemed surprised to see me, but made no move to answer my appeal.

"Please come here!" I called as loudly as I dared. "I am in great trouble, and—" But I got no further, for at that moment Jasper Pilgrim ran around the house and caught me.

He glared at me for a second and spoke to the young man in German, then went back into the kitchen with a great clatter.

It was no surprise to hear him come stumping up the steps, talking angrily to some one who followed him.

After fumbling with the lock, he opened the

door and stepped into the room, Mrs. Pilgrim coming behind and filling up the entrance with her ample person.

"So!" cried Jasper angrily. "Thee would try thee's wiles on honest lads and effect an escape? I 'll put a stop to that."

"She 'll not do it again, Jasper," said Mrs. Pilgrim, soothingly.

"I 'm right well aware of that," he retorted spitefully, looking at me with his false grin. "A gag in her mouth will stay her tongue."

"Nay, you 'd not do that to the lass," Mrs. Pilgrim protested.

"And why not?" he burst in furiously. "Think thee I 'll be thwarted by a slip of a girl? Nay, nay. Here she stays till I have the ring and there shall be no shouting out of windows to give the place a bad name."

"Give him the ring, dearie," Mrs. Pilgrim begged, looking at me, much distressed.

"How many times must I tell you that I have it not?" I asked earnestly. "If you kept me here till Doomsday I could n't give it to you."

"Thee hears her?" Pilgrim snarled, turning to his wife. "Did I not say she was a stubborn

baggage? Get a napkin and we 'll see what a gag will do to sharpen her wits."

"Nay," replied Mrs. Pilgrim, "I 'll not do it."

"What of thy solemn word?" he demanded, and she shrank away from him, shaking her head piteously.

"There will be no need to use a gag," I put in, for I saw the man was intent to have his way with me. "I 'll promise not to call out to any one again."

"What care I for thee's promises?" growled Pilgrim. "Get the napkin," he added, addressing his wife.

"Nay but you can trust her, Jasper," Mrs. Pilgrim insisted, "and 't will save watching." Then, as her husband seemed unrelenting, she went on, "Do not increase the child's suffering needlessly. There 's bad to come of this, so make it no worse than you have already."

At this suggestion Pilgrim appeared to hesitate and I thought it a good time to add to his fear of consequences.

"You may be sure," I said, "that sooner or later I will be found, and 't will not make your punishment easier if I have to tell of cruelty."

He seemed to ponder deeply over this possibility, and I guessed that he was far from a courageous man, for presently he spoke less harshly.

"Does thee give thy solemn word not to call out to any one, no matter who may come to the house?" he demanded.

"Yes, I promise," I answered, for though I liked not to be forced to silence in this way, neither was I anxious to have a gag put in my mouth.

"No matter who may come to the house?" he repeated.

"I 'll keep my word," I said, steadily. "I 've ne'er broke it yet."

He looked hard at me for a moment as if to see whether or not he could trust me, then he slowly nodded his head.

"Very well, see that thee does not now," he muttered, and as he turned to his wife, " 'T is as I told thee. She 's a stubborn jade and 't will take more than a few hours to subdue her. I 'll off to Sperry to see what he advises," and without another word he left the room.

"You 'll give in to him, dearie," Mrs. Pilgrim whispered to me, ere the sounds of his footsteps

died away. " 'T will not help ye to put off the evil day. Come, let me tell him ye 'll give him his way."

"Mrs. Pilgrim," I answered hotly, "you may save your breath to cool your porridge, as the saying is. It is out of my power to give the man the ring. I have told you I have it not. You may search me to prove that I speak the truth."

"Nay, I 'm sure you 'd not lie. But where is it? That 's all he would need to know," she returned coaxingly.

"That I 'll never tell him," I protested vehemently. "Not if he keeps me here for a week."

Mrs. Pilgrim might have gone on pleading with me, though the uselessness of it should have been apparent, but at that moment her husband called her from below, and she hurried out, minding his warning to lock the door.

So far I had lost much upon my first attempt to obtain help, and again I thought of the words on a piece of paper in my pack-pocket. "Overhaste churns bad butter." Evidently I was to have plenty of time on my hands, so I need

not run risks by hurrying in my butter making.

Toward dusk Mrs. Schneider brought me a tray on which were a generous dish of nubs of fried pork swimming in gravy, a great pickle stuffed with cabbage, oelykoeks and a mug of small beer. She set all on the stool and with a friendly smile invited me to eat by a wave of her hand toward the food. I set to immediately though I lacked any sort of appetite; but I had no wish to offend this woman who looked not at all like the sort to play a cruel part knowingly. Truth to tell I liked her, and would have made shift to win her to my side, save for the fact that I could not speak her language nor she mine. Whatever she had heard of me was, of course, lies told by Jasper Pilgrim, which I was helpless to set right just yet; but thinking the time might come when I should find an interpreter, I saw much to gain by keeping the woman in as friendly a humor toward me as possible.

She went out, leaving the door ajar, and I was in two minds whether or not to make a run for it; then on sober second thought I saw how useless that would be while the room below was filled with people and so sat still.

She returned presently with a finely worked night-rail which she laid with some pride on the foot of my bed. And I, catching the drift of her motions, picked up the garment and, in the best way I could, tried to make her comprehend that I admired greatly the beautiful needle-work it showed.

She understood and we nodded and smiled at one another in friendly-wise for a moment or two, then with a wave of her hand toward my supper, she went out with a "Gute Nacht," and a kindly smile. But this time she locked the door after her.

A little later, following the sounds of much talking and clattering of dishes, from which I judged the family were having their supper, Jasper Pilgrim and his wife took their departure. The horses were led from the barn and I heard the old villain's final words in German as they went away; and, though my escape was no nearer for their going, I felt easier in my mind to be free of them both.

There was not even a tallow dip in my room, so I thought it wise to make ready for bed ere the light faded; and while I believed I should

never sleep and but lay upon the bed the better to think over my plans of escape, my eyes grew heavy and I soon dropped off.

It was broad day when I awoke to the sound of the key grating in the lock of the door, and a moment later one of the two girls whom I had seen the morning before and who I judged were Mrs. Schneider's daughters, came in. She was a fine, buxom lass with flaming red hair and a round, good-natured face. She brought with her a ewer of water, a tooth-brush made of a pounded mallow twig, and a comb. These she laid on the chair and then picked up the tray with the remnants of my supper.

All the while she eyed me with what at the time I took for curiosity but which later I learned had another cause as well, and when she went out of the room she turned so as to face me, backing through the door hurriedly.

I got up quickly and was arranging my hair when she returned, bearing my breakfast, which consisted of suppawn and milk. Now, my hair is black and so long that it hangs well down to my knees, and I confess that I take much pride in it. It was hanging in this wise when the maid

came in, and I was much surprised to see her set the tray down quickly on the little stool and begin at once to take down her own hair, which had been braided and wound round her head, German-fashion. I had no idea what she was at till she let it all drop, and then, coming near me, measured the strands to see whose was the longer. She, too, I saw, took pride in her hair, and I was by no means inclined at that moment to contest whose was the finer.

Indeed to make a friend of one's jailer is half way to liberty, which sounds like a saying of Mummer's, and so by the best signs I could, I tried to make her understand how much I admired her flaming locks. Truth to tell they were both longer and thicker than my own, albeit of a less fashionable color.

However, at my first attempt to approach her, she suddenly seemed to remember something she had for the moment forgotten, and exhibited the liveliest terror. Motioning me to keep away she backed to the entrance, finally whipping out and locking the door hastily behind her.

I could not but wonder at these actions, but saw no way to explain them, and so went about

my dressing with as tranquil a mind as I could maintain under the circumstances.

I ate a little of the cornmeal mush and drank most of the milk, and after making my bed, and tidying the little room, I sat down in my chair to pass as best I might the weary hours ahead of me.

More than once I was nigh to tears, thinking of my unfortunate situation, but I comforted myself with the thought that sooner or later Cousin John would find me and I would be back at Denewood, none the worse.

I was thinking thus when suddenly the dog began to bark and I guessed that visitors were arriving. The sounds of several horses came to me and some one shouted; but I could not see the party, for they stopped at the front of the house.

There was some confusion below and I heard the front door open. Then came a voice that made me jump to my feet with joy in my heart.

"We are going from house to house looking for news of Mistress Margaret Travers," were the first words I made out, and I knew it was Cousin John speaking. They had found me at last.

I listened for the answer and heard Mrs. Schneider reply, though of course I could not understand what she said.

"This is a job for you, Hal," Cousin John called, and I remembered that my brother-in-law spoke German. Indeed, the next moment Hal addressed Mrs. Schneider in her own language.

They talked earnestly for perhaps five minutes, while I could scarce stand still with impatience waiting for their footsteps on the stair.

At length Hal began to speak in English.

"She 's not here," he said, "nor have they seen aught of her."

"Then come along," cried Cousin John; "we must hurry on to the next place."

For the moment I could not believe my ears. Then, as I realized that they were going away, I opened my mouth to shout that I was there, but, ere a sound came through my lips, I remembered the promise I had given to Jasper Pilgrim. I had pledged my word not to call out, and with a sob I fell across the bed, as Cousin John and Hal Travers galloped out of the place.

CHAPTER XV

AN ANCIENT ENEMY

I THINK no maid had ever a harder time to keep her word than had I that morning, when I listened to Cousin John and those with him ride out of the Schneider farm, leaving me behind. Lying weeping on my bed, I could hear the hoof-beats of their horses as they galloped rapidly down the lane leading to the main road, and felt assured that a shout from me would bring them back in an instant, and that naught thereafter would keep my friends from me.

But all my life I had held stern notions of honor and now, though safety was in sight, I could not break my word. With an effort I stifled my sobbing to listen. Cousin John's voice giving a command to his little party came back to me, and the hollow echo as the fast-moving horses crossed a little bridge; but at last, strain as I would, I could catch no further sounds. They were gone, never knowing that she for whom

they sought was eating her heart out in a little room scarce fifty feet away.

I knew then that all the while I had been planning to pry out the bars of my window or seek some other means of escape, I had in reality always counted upon Cousin John, or some one from Denewood, to rescue me; and they had come—and gone away again! Mrs. Schneider was not a person who roused suspicion of underhand dealings and it was impossible that they should search every room in every house or cottage for miles about the country. All that could be done was to ask for news of me and, failing that, to go on to the next farm.

Now I must abandon hope of help from home. The search would go on, of course; but they would scarce waste time covering the same ground twice.

Yet even in my own sorrow and disappointment I could not help but feel a deep pang for Bee who loved me dearly, and I pictured her and Mrs. Mummer sadly disappointed when no word of my whereabouts was forthcoming.

Many unhappy thoughts passed through my mind as I lay face down on my bed, feeling very

lonesome, very forlorn and altogether forsaken. There was now no prospect of rescue to keep up my courage, and for a long time I abandoned myself to my misery.

But at length I roused and dried my eyes.

"I must e'en depend upon myself," I said, half aloud; "crying will do no good," and I sat up on the edge of the bed, resolved to be free if it were possible.

Truth to tell, I was fair desperate now, seeing that I must rely wholly upon my own resources, and I looked about the room for a means of escape much more seriously than I had at first.

But nothing new presented itself to me. The bars at the windows were just as strong, the oaken door just as stout, and the walls as thick as ever.

Here I took thought. After all, how thick were those walls? They were plastered, to be sure, and it had never occurred to me before that they might offer any solution to my problem. I sat pondering this diligently, and one thing at least there was in my favor. The room next to mine was unoccupied. Had any one been using it I must have heard them unless, unlike all the

rest of the house, it was carpeted, and this I thought not at all probable. From the position of the doors on the stair landing, I knew which wall separated the two rooms. Would it be possible to dig my way through into that other chamber and so out of the house, at night when all slept?

A little thought convinced me that this might be done, but the process would require considerable time and secrecy on my part. How could I dig my way through the wall and yet conceal the hole while I was doing it? It seemed not easy until I realized that behind the bed was a place I might work and none be the wiser.

Slipping back of it I took a hair-pin and scratched the plaster. To my great delight I found it soft and quite different from the mortar that had been used to cement the bars. With enough patience, and something to pick with, I might in time dig a hole big enough to crawl through. At least it was my only hope, and I determined to make the attempt.

While I sat by the window wondering how I could manage to get a better instrument than a hairpin to break my way out, Mrs. Schneider en-

tered with a broom and a duster, evidently bent upon cleaning. It was her first visit to me that morning and she at once showed me that she was pleased that I had made up my bed. This put another thought into my mind and by dint of gestures and at last taking the besom out of her hands and going through the motions of sweeping, I made it plain to her that I wished to attend to the room myself, having naught else to do. This seemed to put her into a fine humor, and she left me to do my own tidying.

Thus I was assured of privacy behind my bed, which was important, for it gave me the means of hiding any dust or dirt that might be made by digging through the plaster. So I set to work with a will, though the room needed little to make it speckless.

All the while I was thinking diligently upon the problem of a fit instrument to scrape the plaster and at length hit upon a knitting-needle as something I might be able to obtain without exciting suspicion; so, when a little later Mrs. Schneider reappeared, I tried to make her understand that I did not like sitting idle with my hands in my lap, and thought I imitated the motions

of knitting to perfection. At any rate she smiled saying "Ja! Ja!" and nodding up and down that she understood. But alas, she brought me strips of cloth with thread, and naught to serve my purpose save a needle almost too fine for the patchwork; but I dared not protest, and though I felt anything but happy over it, I smiled and thanked her.

Most of that day I sat sewing diligently, and finished putting together the bits of stuff, and then it popped into my head that a pair of shears would be the very thing I wanted.

When later, by wiggling my fingers like scissors, I made this plain to Mrs. Schneider, she shook her head, "Nein," and though she was good-natured enough about it, seeming to regret that she could not comply, she still denied my request, so that I was forced to the conclusion that what I wanted was in use or forbidden. So all that I got by this attempt was the loss of the silver thimble from my housewife, for when Mrs. Schneider gathered up the patchwork, it must have been rolled in it and having no German, I never attempted to ask her for it, though I determined to make another effort to obtain knit-

ting-needles. To my great joy this time she understood and went forthwith to fetch them. She returned almost at once with a huge ball of yarn and the needles; but my heart sank as I saw them, for they were of bone and no good for my purpose.

I could have cried with vexation while I smiled and thanked Mrs. Schneider, and when she went out of the room I had little inclination to begin; for setting a stocking on the needles was ever a task I liked to avoid. Finally, however, it must be done and I started to work, thinking all the while how I was to find a way out of my bondage; but in the end I was forced to depend upon my hairpin and the broken pair of embroidery scissors from my housewife.

That night when the house quieted down after supper, I pulled my bed softly away from the wall and, choosing a place near the floor, began my task. It was slow work, though I soon found that the little scissors served the purpose better than a hairpin, the plaster being sufficiently soft to crumble under their attack. I had spread my petticoats to catch the dust, and picked away in the dark, taking as much comfort as I could

out of the fact that at last I was doing something toward my freedom; but the process was very slow and I foresaw that it would be many days ere I could get my head through the wall, much less my body.

All at once the scissors-blade went through the plaster and I thought that I had pierced the wall, though it seemed amazing thin.

But when, after enlarging the hole, I felt inside with my finger, it came in contact with a rough piece of wood. I did not make this out, and being tired and sleepy it seemed best to rest and wait for dawn to inspect my work.

Before any one else in the house was astir I was up, nibbling like a mouse at my hole again, but I was soon to find my task was not to be so easy as I had hoped when I began. There was stout lath as well as crumbling plaster in that wall, and, without tools, it was impossible for me to make much headway. With a heavy heart I concealed all traces of my night's labor, then crawled back into bed, despairing of ever getting away till Jasper Pilgrim gave the word; but I continued the work at intervals in the days that followed.

I had scarce finished my breakfast and tidied up the room one morning, when I heard the noise of some one ascending the stair and presently a knock sounded on my door. Now a knock was so unusual that I stared a moment, then, recollecting, I bade whoever it was to come in.

There was some fumbling at the lock, as if the person who handled the key was unfamiliar with it, but at length the door opened and the man I had seen with Jasper Pilgrim entered, followed by Mrs. Schneider who awaited the completion of his errand in silence.

This was the first time I had really had a good look at this man's face, and now that I saw him more closely my memory was stirred, and the more I gazed the more certain I became that I had seen him before. Then, like a flash, I remembered who he was, though it was nigh ten years since I had met him.

"You are Captain Blundell," I cried, leaping to my feet.

"At your service," he sneered with a mocking bow, "though 't is not the name I go by in these parts," he added.

At once I understood why Bee had cried out at

sight of him upon the road and had set spurs to her horse to be rid of him. She held this man to be her evil genius, though in the past she had always thwarted him. He had been a captain in the British army when we first knew him, and had it not been for Bee, would have burned Denewood over our heads.

Later, in the South, Bee had rescued Cousin John from him.

I had only seen him at Denewood when he and his troop were quartered upon us during the British occupation of Philadelphia, but, though I was scarce more than a baby at the time, his villainies had made such an impression upon my innocent mind that 't would have been strange had I forgot his evil face.

"What do you want with me?" I demanded, though I guessed what his errand was.

"Nay, be not so short with a man who would do you a service," he answered with a twisted smile upon his lips, as if it irked him to be pleasant.

"Come to the point," I retorted angrily, for I liked not the man nor his manner toward me.

"As you will," he replied. "I 'm looking for a ring—a peculiar ring that—"

"Aye, your partner, Jasper Pilgrim, is after the same," I interrupted. "He has not found it yet."

"As to a partnership," he replied evenly, "I think that is well-nigh dissolved. I can scarce use him further. But touching the matter of a certain ring—"

"You but waste your time coming to me for it," I burst out. "I have not the ring."

"Of that I am well assured," he said, still keeping up his air of lightness, "but it is in my mind that you know where it is."

"Mayhap or mayhap not," I answered. "At any rate I shall not tell you aught of it."

"Oh, will you not," he growled, all pretense gone from his bearing. "Will you not, indeed! Not for your freedom?"

"I want it not at your hands, Captain Blundell," I replied. "I would rather stay here."

He shrugged his shoulders, his lips curling in a smile of scorn.

"Very well. You may stay an the place pleases

you. Nevertheless you will tell me where the ring is!" he went on insolently.

"Never!" I cried.

"Not for the sake of the boy?" he asked.

"What boy?" I demanded.

"The one with Mistress Beatrice Travers," he replied, drawling the name. "I know not what the brat is called, but I can lay hands on him an I want to."

"Nay, you can't fright me that way," I laughed back. "You would not dare to enter Denewood. They 'd whip you off the place."

He scowled darkly, but still kept up the semblance of a mocking mirth.

"They scarce guard the house at night," he remarked, "and it is easy of entrance, if one but knows the way."

"You would n't face John Travers, night or day," I taunted him.

"If there was need I might," he answered; "but, seeing that both he and his lady are on their way to Delaware to look for you, I need not hesitate on that score."

"To Delaware?" I murmured in astonishment; "looking for me?"

"Aye," he replied, with an evil smile. "They were somewhat exercised over your disappearance and, having searched the country about here without success, they were quite ready to start on a wild-goose chase to Delaware. You may be interested to learn that I caused the rumor to be put about that you had been seen faring that way." He ended with a laugh, occasioned no doubt by the blank expression of my face.

"Cousin John and Bee gone!" I murmured to myself. "Looking for me?"

"Aye," said Blundell. "So you see, should I take a notion to the child, I need not fear the redoubtable Mr. Travers."

"But the servants and Mrs. Mummer are there. You'll not fool them!" I retorted with spirit and confidence.

"All things are easy, if one but knows the way," he answered. "And I know a way from the spring house to the fireplace in a room that used to be the nursery."

At those words my face must have blanched, for indeed he was speaking of a thing I thought not more than half a dozen people in all the world were aware of. Behind the fireplace, in

the day-nursery, on the upper floor of the Denewood house, there is an entrance into a secret passage that leads down a rough stair built in between the walls, and going underground, opens in a sort of cave in the spring-house. I found it when I was a wee girl, and Bee always called it "Peg's mouse's hole," because that was the name I gave it. But except for Bee and Cousin John, Bart my brother, and Allen McLane, none were supposed to know of it. That secret gave Blundell an entrance to the house wholly unsuspected to those left in it, and put its inmates at his mercy.

"How knew you of that?" I half-whispered, for I was greatly frightened and saw that indeed the man had the upper hand of me.

"What difference does it make how I know, so long as I do know?" he replied; "but, since you ask, I will tell you that the magus Schmuck, being interested some years ago in finding a map, and having reason to believe it was hid in Denewood, hit upon the secret stairway; though, to be sure, it never helped him to the map. I shared his discovery and now find it suits my purpose

to visit the house again. T' is a fine house, think you not?" he ended with a shrug and a bow, as if he talked of trivial matters.

"You would not take the child," I said.

"Why not?" he asked—then bitterly, "Think you I love John Travers and his wife so well that I would weep if they suffered? You see what I 've come to," he went on in a burst of passion. "I, a man of position in my own country, brought to plotting with a scoundrel like Pilgrim. And all because of these Denewood folk who interfered with my plans years ago. I tell you once and for all, I shall have the ring or the child! You can take your choice."

"But I have it not," I answered, in agony. "I gave it to Mark Powell, and he—"

"Very well," he broke in, "then I take the child," and he half turned toward the door as if to go.

"Stay!" I cried, for there was no doubt the man held me in the hollow of his hand. What cared I for the ring or anything else when little Jack was in the balance? He might have all I possessed in the world to forego his purpose, for

that he had the means to fulfil it I no longer doubted. His knowledge of the secret passage made me helpless.

"Speak up," he commanded, hardly stopping; "I 've no time to lose."

"I mentioned a place where I keep the ring," I faltered. "I know not whether Mark put it back there or not. But I think he will have done so."

"Where is that?" he demanded, so eagerly that I saw the ring meant a great deal to him.

"I must have my freedom if I tell you where it is," I answered stiffly.

"That's fair enough," he replied, "but I shall not dare to enter the house at Denewood until, say eleven o'clock. By that time the servants will be sound asleep and I can find the ring—or the child—without disturbing them. It would take an hour's hard riding to get here afterward, which would bring the time to midnight. You would scarce care to take the road at that hour, so I fear to-morrow morning will be the earliest you can look for freedom."

"And you will not take the child if I tell you where the ring is?" I begged, desperately.

Though he said "yes" or "no" made little difference, for I could not trust the man, yet I had to trust him, and longed for some assurance.

"The child would only hamper me," he returned.

"Very well, then," I said. "Listen. My room is next the room you enter coming by the secret passage, and the ring is hid in my powdering-box," I ended. The moment the words were out of my mouth he gave a cry of joy.

"Ah ha! Mistress Peggy," he cried, "I 'll find my way to the ring, never fear, and until to-morrow, good-day to you," and out he went excitedly, running down the steps two at a time, followed more slowly by Mrs. Schneider who stayed to lock the door with her usual deliberation.

I had parted with my ring and was no nearer freedom than before; but that was not what troubled me. This sudden appearance of Captain Blundell, and the menace of his revengeful presence, put a fear into my heart that thrust all else into the background.

CHAPTER XVI

FRIEND OR FOE

CAPTAIN BLUNDELL'S departure left me truly desperate. The need to warn those at Denewood ere eleven o'clock that night was so pressing that my escape from the Schneiders' was no longer a matter touching only my own comfort and convenience. The more I thought upon it the more miserable I became, for I could put no trust in the man's promises either to liberate me on the morrow or not to take little Jack.

And his knowledge of the secret entrance to Denewood gave him so great a power that even had Cousin John and Bee been at home he might still have been successful. But, by his connivance, they were away; and that fact in itself showed all too plainly that there had been a well-laid plan to insure the success of his venture.

Nor could I doubt the man told the truth about how he came by his knowledge of the passage. We all knew there had been an unseen visitor at

Denewood upon more than one occasion, who, on a search for a map, had turned things upside down in both Cousin John's and Bee's rooms. Naught had been stolen, and, perhaps on that account, less was made of these strange visitations than would have been the case otherwise. We had wondered how this mysterious person had made an entrance without any one being aware of it, and here was the explanation. Schmuck the magus, the father of Bill Schmuck, Cousin John's faithful body-servant, had found the passage, and let Blundell into the secret. But how could Mrs. Mummer and the servants, who knew naught of its existence, be expected to guard it?

I must escape in time at any cost.

Another matter, too, disturbed me. I was by no means sure that Mark Powell would have put the ring in the box as I had suggested. There had been no definite request for him to do it. My mention of it had been in a bantering spirit, and it was not unlikely that he might have given it to Bee for safekeeping. In that case Blundell, missing the ring, would take the child out of revenge, thinking I had befooled him of a set purpose.

I sat by the window quite distracted, knowing not what I could do, puzzling over and over again the same situation without finding a circumstance to give me comfort. As I gazed out, giving scant heed to what went on below me, I heard the clatter of two horses entering the place with the usual accompaniment of the dog's barking. In a moment Jasper Pilgrim, whom I had not seen for days, and another rode up to the barns and dismounted.

The newcomer was a stranger to me, but at first glance I saw that he was not of Jasper Pilgrim's stamp. He was quite young, hardly more than a boy, and dressed most fashionable, though he was somewhat splashed from riding. Plainly he was a gentleman, and my eye had not looked upon his like since the Marquis de Lafayette had been a visitor at Denewood. My heart gave a bound of hope, for in him it seemed I might find one to help me.

My first object, however, was to attract his attention without breaking my promise not to call for aid. He must be made aware that I was in the house, for once he left the barns he might not come that way again at all.

On a sudden I perched myself on the edge of the window, grasped the bars to keep my balance and lifted my voice to sing. Albeit my song trembled a little at first, the ruse served its purpose.

"Quaker, Quaker, how art thee?" I caroled my loudest, and it had the effect I desired.

With a scowl Jasper Pilgrim lifted his head, but so did the strange young man upon whose lips I saw the shadow of a smile at the words of the catch.

"Thee must heed her not," cried Pilgrim. "'T is the poor daft daughter of the respectable woman with whom we are to lodge." So saying, he stepped out of sight, expecting no doubt that the young man would follow, but the latter lingered for a moment and I saw the smile fade from his face as he looked up at me.

At that I shook my head vigorously in denial of Pilgrim's words and clasped my hands in supplication. This greatly surprised him, and I felt one word might bring the help I was in such sore need of; but my promise still held, even though now I was not the one most deeply concerned in the matter. I could not call to him in honor, and

after a moment's lingering, he too moved out of sight.

But Jasper Pilgrim's remark to the young man had opened my mind to the reasons for the strange actions of the Schneider family. I guessed that he had told them I was crazed, and this was an explanation of his pretended fear of me on the day of my arrival. Truly he had planned well, for no matter what I might have said to Mrs. Schneider could I have made her understand, she would have put it all down to what she supposed was my mental illness.

But I had scarce time to ponder this, for I heard the hurried ascent of a man, with small doubt of who it was.

A moment later Jasper Pilgrim burst open the door and confronted me angrily.

"These are pretty goings on!" he cried. "Dost think to make a mock of me to my face and get off scot free?"

"Getting free is what I most desire," I returned, ready now to do aught this man might wish. "You said you would let me go if I told you where the ring is. Well, I 'm ready to tell you."

He seemed a trifle surprised, but his habitual grin showed a trace of triumph.

"Good," he muttered, rubbing his hands; "where is it?"

"'T is in my room in Denewood in Germantown," I answered. "Take me there and I will hand it over to you."

He looked at me keenly for an instant, then shook his head, his eyes narrowing cunningly like a fox's.

"Nay; thee cannot befool me so easily," he said. "First I must have the ring— Then thee can go thy ways."

"But how can that be managed?" I asked.

"'T is not difficult to write a note to thee's friends in Germantown; but why has thee changed thy mind so suddenly?"

"I must be at Denewood ere sundown," I told him, thinking of naught but that. "Get me ink and paper and I will write, if you promise to return in time so that I may be home ere it is dark."

He considered for a moment, then with a shrug he turned on his heel.

"Very well," he muttered; "I go for writing implements."

He was away but a few moments, returning presently with a quill, some thick ink in a bottle and a sheet of coarse paper. These he placed upon the stool and motioned me to take the chair before it.

"Now write," he said, and I picked up the quill and prepared to set it to the paper,

"Nay, not so fast," he went on. "I 'll tell thee what to say. Whom is it to be sent to?"

"Mrs. Mummer, the housekeeper," I answered.

"Set that down," he commanded, and upon my doing so he dictated the following note which I wrote out faithfully:

Dear Mrs. Mummer, I am held a prisoner until I give up the ring which thee will find in the powdering-box in my room. Please hand it to the highly honest and respectable gentleman who presents this note. He is but a faithful messenger and has naught to do with the matter that is in any way reprehensible.

"Now sign thy name," he ended, with a queer chuckle which sounded more like a crow's caw than the laugh of a man.

This done, he took the short letter and read it through, his eyes gleaming with pleasure.

Doubtless he found much joy in the words describing him.

"And now," he said, "to prove that I am not so hard as thee thinks, I will ride fast, both there and back, to give thee thy liberty as soon as may be," with which words he left the room and I shortly saw him ride off alone, apparently with every intention of making haste. His eagerness to be gone, though I knew it was for his own selfish purpose, yet pleased me, and I resigned myself to awaiting his return as patiently as might be.

But it was a good three hours ere he came and in the meantime I had eaten my dinner and had grown more and more anxious.

Blundell had said that Denewood was but an hour away. Why should Jasper Pilgrim take so long?

He came at last, riding furiously into the place, and as he flung himself off his tired beast, he turned to my window and shook his fist at me. My heart sank as I waited for him to clatter up the stair and enter my room.

"Thee stubborn huzzy," he shouted, ere he was

fairly through the door, "why did thee send me on a false errand?"

"Did you not find the ring?" I gasped, though of course I knew what the answer must be.

"Nay, the woman would not go for it," he cried. "They knew thy hand, but said the letter was wrote under duress. Oh, look not so innocent. Thee knew all along thee was sending me into a trap. Thee saucy jade! Thee thinks because I am a weak old man I cannot harm thee. Wait till my wife comes in the morning. I 'll see thee gets the beating thee deserves."

But his threat made scarce any impression upon me then; for I felt sure that if Mrs. Mummer had not looked for the ring it was because it was not there. She knew that Mark Powell had done something else with it. In which case Blundell would not find it, and then—

"You must take me to Denewood!" I burst out. "I must go there. And I promise I 'll give the ring to you."

"Oh, 't is likely I 'd go back there," he fair screamed. "Yea, after fleeing for my life from them. Does thee know how they set upon me? That they tried to keep me till I said where thee

was? That they were going to beat me into telling them and that it was through sheer luck I escaped? Oh, I 'll take thee back!"

He was beside himself with anger and I knew it was useless to ask aught of him or to try to bargain further.

"And what was Sperry doing here?" he demanded suddenly.

"I know no Sperry," I answered.

"So thee adds falsehood to the score against thee," he blustered; "the reckoning will come on the morrow, never fear."

"Nay, I 'm telling you the truth," I vowed stoutly. "I have seen no one but Captain Blundell."

"Oh, 't is by that name thee knows him," he muttered. "Well, mayhap he hath a dozen others. He wanted to know of the ring, I warrant thee?"

"Yes," I replied shortly.

"And did thee tell him of the box in thy room?" he demanded threateningly.

"I did," I said, not caring to deny it. "He will seek the ring to-night."

"To-night," he muttered to himself, then

stopped and looked at me a little perplexed. "I think thee still wishes me to believe thee does not know thyself where the ring is."

"In truth I fear I do not," I admitted; "so why not let me go in search of it?"

"Thee 's a cunning one, with ever an answer ready," he snarled. "Nay, nay! Here thee stays till I get the truth out of thee. Ponder it well, and, for thee's own sake, I hope the morning brings thee better council," and with that he turned on his heel and left me.

But one chance of escape seemed now open to me and that could scarce be called a chance. I was powerless to get out by myself and the only possible source of help was the young stranger who had looked up at me that morning. True, he had seemed to have pity for me, but I had neither seen nor heard anything of him since that momentary glimpse. Would he come to my aid? It was a slender thread upon which to hang my only hope.

Later in the afternoon I heard footsteps on the bare floor of the stairs and I thought of course it was another unwelcome visitor to me, but my

attention was held by the sound of a new voice speaking outside my door.

"It may be 'otter, yet I shall not mind that," he said. "The good doctor he order that I sleep not near the ground. You compre-hend?" The words were spoken as might a Frenchman and I knew it must be the youth I had seen that morning.

" 'T is small, but thee will doubtless be comfortable," Jasper Pilgrim remarked, and I heard the two men pass into the chamber next to mine. I was tense with eagerness that here perchance was coming my opportunity to summon assistance.

A moment later Pilgrim alone went downstairs, and as I heard the door close behind him I pulled my bed aside and attacked the hole I had made in the plaster. I must speak to the young Frenchman and to do that a small opening in the plaster beyond the laths was necessary.

Madly I tore the pins from my hair and went to work. I waited not to brush up the dust, but let it fall as it would, with no thought of what might happen if I was there on the morrow. For

this was my last chance. I must throw myself on the mercy of this French youth if I was to save little Jack from Blundell.

Suddenly the plaster between two stout laths gave way, and I knew I had opened a hole, albeit a small one, and listened a moment to see if the falling plaster might have drawn the attention of the young man; but though I heard naught of him, the sound of footsteps ascending the stair were plain enough, and I hurriedly pushed the bed against the wall to be prepared for whoever might be coming.

It was naught but my tray of supper brought by the red-haired girl. She set it down and, for the second time in our acquaintance, she lingered a moment.

"Pretty yentlemens," she said, nodding toward the wall that separated the rooms, and blushing at her attempt at English. Plainly the young man was winning golden opinions below stairs, but I had no time to give thought to that. He might at any moment leave his room and I knew not when he would return.

Ordinarily I would have welcomed the opportunity to make friends with the girl, but now I

had not a second to waste upon her. I wanted her to leave me as quickly as possible and to stay away; so, remembering that Jasper Pilgrim had said I was daft, I thought that now if ever was the chance to take advantage of his falsehood.

Leaping to my feet, I made a dive at the girl, twisting my face into a horrible grimace; and with one half-stifled gasp of fear, she dashed through the door, locking it behind her. I could count upon being free of interruption from her for some time to come—and, with a fast-beating heart, I pulled away my bed and kneeling on the floor, put my mouth to the hole I had made in the wall.

The moment for the test was at hand. Would I find a friend or a foe?

CHAPTER XVII

PYRAMUS AND THISBE

AND now that the opportunity I had hoped for was come, I hesitated. For a second or two I kneeled on the floor with my face close to the hole, knowing not what words to use to tell this stranger all that it was in my mind to say. I thought at first to speak in French, which I could do passably well on ordinary occasions, but seeing that Jasper Pilgrim had used English, I dismissed the idea of trying to express myself in a foreign language. I would be sure to stutter.

How was I to call him? What should I say first? I was eager to put my last chance to the test and could I have shouted to him would doubtless have found my tongue readily enough. But to whisper seemed to put a halter on my speech.

Just then another idea came to me which seemed to hold out a surer promise of saving little Jack. If the young man would but take a

message to Denewood the boy would be protected from Blundell, and my liberation could wait until that was made certain.

"Oh, please," I whispered, through the hole in the wall, "won't you help me?" I had found my tongue and waited a second for a response; but none came.

"Oh, please, sir," I said again, this time a little louder.

At once I heard a movement in the room as if the young man had risen suddenly to his feet, pushing back a chair upon which he had been sitting.

"Where are you, mademoiselle?" he whispered in answer after an instant.

"Here by the wall. You will see a little hole. Oh, please help me!" I put all the pleading I could into my words and was overjoyed to hear him moving toward me.

For another long moment I could make out the faint sounds of his hands as they felt along the wall, and then the light coming through the hole was blocked.

"I have foun' it, mademoiselle," he murmured. "Speak."

"I greatly fear they will hear me downstairs," I replied, "and I am in great trouble."

"Have you a piece of paper?" he breathed back.

"Yes."

"Then roll it into what you call a *corne d'abondance.* You understan'?"

"Yes, a cornucopia," I replied.

"That is it," he said, with the faintest of laughs. "Set it through the 'ole and it will sen' to me your voice and keep it from traveling."

The only bit of paper I had was the small piece, still treasured in my pack-pocket, which I had taken from little Jack while we were with Tiscoquam. I could not see the words, but I still remembered them. "Overhaste churns bad butter." Was it for this that I had kept it?

I rolled it into a little tube and pushed it through.

"Can you hear me?" I murmured as gently as I could.

"Parfaitement," he answered. "Express to me what you would 'ave."

"I am not crazy," I began.

"There is no need to tell that," he broke in.

"And I am not that woman's daughter."

"I knew that the momen' I behol' you," he again interrupted.

"It is Jasper Pilgrim who holds me here, trying to force me to tell him something," I tried to explain.

"He is the ol' rascal," the Frenchman murmured, and then a little louder: "If mademoiselle will permit, I shall be honor' to escort her where she will."

"But they will not let you, monsieur!" I said. "They are many, and—and I cannot risk that anything should happen to you."

"Mais non! Think only of yourself, mademoiselle," he replied, gallantly. "So long as you escape—"

"But there is something more important than my escape," I interrupted. "I must send a message to Germantown before eleven o'clock tonight, or a great wrong will be done."

"Ah, I know the Germantown," he whispered. "I passed that way yesterday. I shall be your messenger, mademoiselle."

"Oh, will you?" I burst out, nigh forgetting in my gladness to keep my voice lowered.

"Mademoiselle has but to comman' me," he returned, and I could imagine a polite little bow as he said it.

"Then if you will go to Germantown, monsieur, once there any one can tell you where Denewood is," I hastened to explain. "It is the estate of my cousin, Mr. John Travers, with whom I live. He and Madam Travers are not at home, but the housekeeper, Mrs. Mummer, will receive you. Tell her not to let little Jack out of her sight, day or night. Say that Peggy sends the message."

"And you are Mademoiselle Peggy?" he asked, politely.

"I am Margaret Travers," I answered, "but every one calls me Peggy."

"Ah, mademoiselle," he went on, "permit that I introduce myself. "I am Gervaise Etienne Louis Victor de Soulange—at your service; but one cannot remember all those long names, so my frien's—they call me Victor."

I murmured something suitable, but with all my worry and perplexity I could not help thinking how funny was this introduction! To meet a polished French gentleman through a little hole

in the wall—and with such a long name, too! But I was in no mood even to smile.

"And you will take the message?" I asked, anxiously.

"Most certainly, mademoiselle," he answered, and his voice had in it a tone of assurance that lifted a load from my heart. I felt confident he meant what he said, and that he had the will to go through with whatever he might undertake.

"But what of you, mademoiselle?" he added, after a moment.

"Oh, I will be all right—only—" I hesitated —"only, tell them to hurry here in the morning, or I shall be beaten."

"Beaten," he echoed, and muttered something under his breath. "Mademoiselle, it is unthinkable that I leave you to be beaten."

"But you must save the boy," I hastened to tell him. "Don't concern yourself about me."

"That is impossible, mademoiselle," he replied, "but, think, can we not both escape to Germantown to-night after they are asleep? 'T is but an hour's ride."

"Oh, I would go so gladly," I answered, "but suppose we were caught? Then there would be

no one to take the message to Denewood. No, monsieur, leave me to-night and go alone. The beating comes not till to-morrow when Mrs. Pilgrim arrives."

"Listen, mademoiselle," he said earnestly. "I am a man of honor, and could not in decency leave you here another night. I have think of you all day since I behol' you at the window this morning. I have listen' for a word of you. Nothing! I have look' to have you appear down the stairs. Never! So, I have watch' and I see the women come upstairs with food and before they go they take a great key which is hong by the door. When they return they bring again the key and hang it up. So I know you are lock' in this room and that is why I deman' to come up the stair for my sleeping-chamber. They would have me to remain below. No! I tell them my doctor will not let me sleep so near the ground. Indeed that is true, for is it not said that 'every man is his own best physician'? And it has brought me to your help, mademoiselle."

"Oh, thank you, monsieur, if you will but carry word to Denewood I shall always be grateful to you."

"Ah, but wait," he murmured. "The key it still hang there. I shall take it and open your door. Then we go."

"But if we are caught, monsieur, I have no messenger."

"That is true," he conceded. "Yet wait," he went on, as if he were planning something. "Ah, I have it. See! I go downstairs when all is quiet. I lif' the key and go outside. If I am stop' I explain that it is so 'ot and say something more which my physician has think of. Then, mademoiselle, you will drop a cord from your window to pull up the key, while I make ready the horse. If you are stop' I gallop off with your message and bring the help to you. If not, we go together."

To that plan I agreed, though I should have preferred that he start earlier in the evening, as if to take a ride, and leave me behind; but that he would not willingly do, and, truth to tell, I was glad enough to see a way of escape, if it did not jeopardize the chance of warning them at Denewood.

"And now, monsieur, you must go down stairs or they will suspect something," I whispered.

"That is perhaps best, mademoiselle," he admitted, reluctantly. "This room is not so gay that I could make of it an excuse for remaining in it, but if I need to say what you call an explanation, I have still my doctor! I fear, mademoiselle, these people will think I am an invalid tottering to my grave."

His tone was so light and confident that I perforce caught some of his spirit and felt happier than for many a day.

After he had gone I waited as patiently as I might for darkness and the gradual quieting of the house. By nine o'clock I was sure they would all be asleep, or near it, for they were country folk. That would give us two good hours to reach Denewood ere the time Blundell had set for carrying out his schemes and I was most hopeful that I would balk them.

Just at dusk I saw Jasper Pilgrim go hastily to the barn and in a few moments ride off. I was not sure, in the uncertain light, that it was he, till the dog barked and he called out angrily to it; then there was no mistaking his voice.

"He has gone for his wife to bring me that

beating," I said to myself, and was half-way between tears and laughter at the thought.

It seemed an interminable time before the household tasks below were at an end, but at length the Schneiders bed-hour came, and M. Victor returned up the stairs. He went directly to his room and closed the door with a bang, while I, with fast-beating heart, hurried to the hole in the wall.

"Are you there, mademoiselle?" he whispered.

"Yes—is it time?" I asked.

"In a few moments now. Have you the cord ready to pull up the key?" he asked.

"Oh, I had forgotten, but I will find something at once," I answered with a pang of regret at the hours I had wasted.

"I will leave my cloak at your door," he went on. "It is of dark color and will serve to make you less notice'. But do not fear, mademoiselle. All will be well."

A few minutes later I heard him step quietly out of his room, but he went so softly that I caught no creak of the stairs as he descended.

Meanwhile I was puzzling my head over what to use in lieu of a cord. The bed was covered

with a patch-work quilt all too stout to tear and so marvelously well sewed that with only half a scissors I could not start a thread. My petticoat served me in the same way. It was one of the last set Mrs. Mummer had bought for me, new and so strong that I was forced to give that up. My dress was tattered at the hem, but it frayed rather than tore, and this exhausted my resources. I began to despair of getting so simple a thing as a cord with which to gain my liberty.

Time was slipping by. At any moment M. Victor might come bringing the key—it was then I bethought me of my hair. In my haste I would have snipped it all off had I possessed a pair of shears, but pulling it out one hair at a time set me thinking. The key was not heavy. Three or four single hairs twisted together would certainly carry it to me and, saying each hair was four feet long and the distance to the ground no more than fifteen, I knew I should have my cord if I knotted together four strands of six hairs each.

This I did, with no very great pleasure, but when I came to lower it out of the window it

floated so in the breeze that I was sure it would never reach the ground. Moreover, no one could see it in the darkness.

Pulling it back, I took one of my well-worn hairpins and bent it into the form of a hook, which I knotted to the end of my line, and, to make it show, stuck my precious piece of paper on like bait. Once more I dropped it out of the window, just as a dim shadow came toward the house from the direction of the barn.

It was the young Frenchman, and I could feel him twitching the strands of hair as he secured the key. Slowly and with as much caution as I could use considering my impatience, I pulled it up, and at last it was in my hand.

I wasted no time in regrets at leaving that little room and hurried to the door on tiptoe.

But the minute I started to put the key in the lock, the noise made by the rusty metal seemed so loud to my sensitive ears that I stopped appalled. The next instant I breathed a sigh of relief and, going to my supper-tray which was sitting on the chair, I rubbed a good piece of butter on the key, leaving enough to oil the lock somewhat also.

This served admirably, albeit the bolt still grated more loudly than I could have wished, but at last the door was open and I was on the little landing at the top of the stairs.

My foot struck the cloak M. Victor had left for me and as I picked it up I felt also a hat which I clapped on my head with a nervous and silent little laugh. My own had been taken from me, and doubtless the Frenchman had thought of that possibility when he left the cloak.

But as luck would have it that garment was nigh my undoing. I had descended the stairs quite noiselessly and was making my way across the large kitchen when the skirt of the cloak caught the handle of a mop and brought it clattering to the floor with a great racket.

I gasped for breath in my flight and stood rigid, listening intently. But I was not kept long in doubt. Almost on the instant a door from one of the rooms was opened, and a dim, white figure appeared.

"Wer geht da!" came the question, in the voice of the red-haired daughter of Mrs. Schneider.

My first instinct was to fly, but that would certainly raise the alarm and bring the household

about my ears. I knew that she could see me but vaguely and I determined to put my French to some account at last.

I whipped off my hat and made a low bow in her direction.

"Il fait si chaud, mademoiselle," I murmured. "So 'ot, in English. I go to tak' the air, as I cannot sleep. It desolate' me to disturb your slumber'."

I cannot say how good my imitation was, but it passed. With a giggle the girl retreated into her room, and in another moment I was outside the house.

I ran to the barns, and there stood M. Victor's horse, saddled with a pillion behind, all ready for our departure.

"Good, mademoiselle!" he murmured. "Come! We was'e no time," and in another moment we were mounted and ready to pick our way over the grass and so to the road.

But we had forgot the dog. Scarce had the horse taken a step when out burst a series of howls that were enough to wake the dead.

On the instant it seemed that everybody roused at once. There were shouts from all sides.

"Hold hard, mademoiselle," cried M. Victor. "We will not stay to parley, eh?" and he gave the horse a cut with his whip and off we galloped to the road.

CHAPTER XVIII

STOP T'IEF

THERE was a perfect Bedlam of noises behind us as we turned out of the gate. I was inclined to be alarmed, but M. Victor was in the gayest of moods.

"We have wake' more than one dog, mademoiselle," he cried, "and all bark!"

"Would it not have been better to take another horse for me?" I asked, seeing that if we were pursued our beast, carrying double, would be at a disadvantage.

"I have think of that," he answered, "but I like' not to make free with the horses of strangers. Already they cry thief. But do not fear, mademoiselle. We shall win to the Germantown."

He spoke so confidently that I caught the infection of his high spirits.

"I would I could see Jasper Pilgrim's face in the morning when he comes back to give me that beating," I laughed.

"Ah, do not speak of it, mademoiselle," M. Victor burst out wrathfully. "The man is a beast."

"Nay, be not so serious," I replied. "I am done with him now. I do not think he will have the hardihood to come to Denewood for me."

"But I am not done with him," said the young Frenchman rather grimly, and I could not help but wonder how it came about that so courteous a gentleman should be associated with the scoundrelly Pilgrim. But though I was sufficiently curious, I could not, in decency, ask him.

Hearing naught of a pursuit, M. de Soulange slacked the horse's pace and we moved along more cautiously. You may be sure I was ready enough to gallop all the way, but I realized the wisdom of going more slowly. Though the moon would soon be rising to give us a good light, it was still too dark to see the road clearly. A stumble might ruin our chances, and, to curb my impatience, I thought of the saying upon that piece of paper that had been left behind. "Overhaste churns bad butter."

We had made fair progress, and M. Victor seemed so certain of his way that I had ceased

to worry, when, quite suddenly, he checked his horse.

"Listen," he said in a whisper; and I held my breath.

At first I heard naught, though I strained my ears, then quite unmistakably, the dull sound of hoofbeats at a distance came to me.

"The horse hear' it first," declared M. Victor. "I see him prick up his ear', and wonder what it means. Are they behin' us?"

I listened again.

"No, I think they are on our right hand," I answered.

"I think so, too," he agreed; "but they approach."

"Yes," I replied, for the sounds were growing more distinct each moment.

"Is there a short cut?" asked M. Victor, speaking as if to himself. "Ah, that mus' be it! They hope to intercep' us." Then, clapping his hand to his belt, he gave an exclamation of dismay. "Foolish that I am," he muttered, "to have forget my pistol'."

Evidently he anticipated danger of some sort and at once I became anxious.

"Who do you think it can be?" I questioned.

"What care we, mademoiselle?" he answered gaily, "though I have not my pistol' I still have a sword. There is no danger."

He spurred his horse, setting it at a gallop, and I guessed that he hoped to pass the road down which the approaching horsemen were coming ere they reached the junction.

"Hol' tight, mademoiselle," M. Victor murmured, half turning his head, while with his free hand he drew his sword. Then leaning forward on his beast's neck, he urged it faster.

We could not tell from the sounds how near the riders were, nor whether we were to be intercepted; but it was plain that, if we were to meet our pursuers, the spot was not far off.

"Monsieur," I said, "if they stop us I shall slip down and run into the woods and then on to Denewood," and as I spoke I loosened the cloak from about my shoulders and laid it across my arm, so that I could drop it lest it hinder me when I took to running.

"Nay, mademoiselle, we shall not be easily stopp'," he replied, and even as he spoke there was a shout a little ahead of us and we saw the

dim outline of a horse as it was reined across our path.

"Let me get down!" I cried.

"Nay, not yet," he insisted, and spurred his horse the faster toward the unknown man who blocked the way.

The rider ahead, seeing us approaching, shouted something in German which I could not understand, but by the language I knew it was a man from the Schneider farm.

And now we were a-top of him.

"Stop!" cried the man. "Stop! Stop!" He repeated the word again and again; but it had no effect upon M. Victor, who was riding as if to run him down, which perchance he might have done had not another horseman appeared, taking up his position beside his companion, and so closing our road completely.

At that M. Victor drew in our horse and brought it to a stop within touching distance of the two.

"Out of my way," he shouted to them, raising his sword. "Seek not to stay a lady on an urgent errand. Out of the way, I say," and he threatened them.

"T'ief! T'ief!" they called together in broken English, and one ventured to lay a hand on our horse's bridle.

"You dare!" cried M. Victor, and down came the flat of the sword on the man's arm, with such a right good will that he drew back with a cry of pain, pulling his horse out of our path.

On the instant M. Victor plunged spurs into our beast, which sprang forward with a jump, but the other German was as prompt and started off beside us.

"Stop!" he ordered. "Stop, or I shoot!" and I saw the gleam of a pistol-barrel pointed at M. Victor's head, scarce a foot away from it.

Instinctively I flung out my arm to brush it aside and, sensing rather than seeing the cloak that hung over it, with a mighty effort I managed to throw it over the man's head, disturbing his aim, as his pistol went off with a smothered report which caused his horse to shy into the ditch beside the road.

"Go on, monsieur; we're past them," I told him, and I looked back to see the man struggling to loose his head, while his horse plunged wildly, nigh unseating him.

But we were not to get off without a run for it, though we now had a start and the horse under us was a strong one.

"They would never have catch us save for that short cut," said M. Victor, "and they will not again." And patting his horse's neck, he leaned over and spoke to it encouragingly, and it flew along with great strides as if it understood. Indeed, the pursuit now was but half-hearted, and presently we heard them no more and concluded that they had given up the chase.

Soon we turned into the Wissahickon road and from there I knew my way. Also the moon had risen, and though it was past the full it yet gave us plenty of light. We now struck off to the left, and 't was scarce ten o'clock when we entered the long drive at Denewood.

"We are in plenty of time," I said, with a sigh of relief. "How can I ever thank you, Monsieur de Soulange?"

"Do not talk of that, mademoiselle," he replied. "'T is that I have enjoy the pleasure. My doctor say it is good for my health that I take the ride' by moonlight. Beside you have save' my life, mademoiselle."

"What mean you?" I asked, for I did not think he knew that his cloak was some miles back upon the road we had come.

"What have you done with my cloak, mademoiselle?" he inquired meaningly.

"I 've lost it, monsieur," I replied. "And your hat also," I added, for in the race that had dropped off, though I scarce knew it at the time.

" 'T is better to have lose that than the head," he laughed back, and then, seriously, "I shall always be your debtor, mademoiselle."

"Nay, monsieur, did you not save me?" I replied. "Let us cry quits."

"Mais non!" he exclaimed. "Not quits. That means the end of things. I hope mademoiselle does not mean an end to our—our—may I say—friendship?"

"Oh, no, indeed," I replied quickly, and then suddenly we fell silent.

We soon came in sight of the house, but instead of the bright lights I had expected to see burning in the windows, everything was dark as though the place were deserted. It had a strange look, for Denewood was an open house, always

ready to welcome a guest, night or day, with the best that could be provided.

Monsieur de Soulange pulled up before the step.

"Wait, monsieur," I said, slipping down quickly, "I will have some one take your horse," and I ran to the front door.

But though I plied the knocker with a will and heard the sounds of it echoing through the halls, no response came and for a moment I stood appalled. What could have happened?

I ran down the steps of the portico and so around the house to the back, while M. Victor followed, leading his horse. But here, too, the doors were locked, the windows shuttered and barred, and from no crack nor cranny was there a ray of light to show that any were within.

"Has Captain Blundell been here already?" I murmured, looking helplessly at M Victor. "What can it mean?"

"I should say there was no one at home, mademoiselle," he answered.

"But that is impossible," I protested. "Even if Bee and Cousin John are away, where are all

the servants? And Mummer the steward, and Mrs. Mummer and—" I might have named a dozen that should have been there, but what was the use? No one came in answer to my summons, and I must e'en take my own measures to gain an entrance.

"I know a way in, monsieur," I explained. "Tie your horse to the post and let us hurry."

"Nay, he will stand quite still, mademoiselle," he assured me, leading the good beast to the side of the driveway and speaking a word to it. "I am at your service," he ended, taking his place beside me.

"It is through a secret passage I must lead you," I explained. "You will get your feet wet, monsieur, but I dare not go alone, for fear of meeting this Captain Blundell."

"I think, mademoiselle, my doctor have not forbid it that I wet my feet," he answered lightly. "I shall be honor' to accompany you."

"Have ready your sword," I cautioned him, not knowing what to expect.

We crossed the brick-paved court beside the kitchens, dark under the shade of the great maples surrounding the mansion, and came in sight

of the spring-house showing plainly in the moonlight.

"There is the place we are going," I said, pointing.

"Then I lead," M. Victor remarked under his breath, and stepped ahead, carrying his naked sword in his hand.

But we had scarce started ere he halted, holding out his arm to stay me.

"There is a man there," he whispered, and as he spoke I saw a crouching form move swiftly toward the door of the spring-house and disappear inside.

"It is Blundell," I cried. "Quick, monsieur; we must stop him before he takes the boy." And without a thought of myself I ran across the intervening space.

"Nay, mademoiselle," protested M. Victor, seizing my arm. "This is man's work. Let me go first."

He waited not for my assent, but thrust me behind him and hurried forward.

At the door of the spring-house he paused a moment; but I was sure Blundell would have gone on through the passage.

"He 's not in there, monsieur," I exclaimed, making no effort to lower my voice, and at the words there was an outcry of fear from within, and a black shape darted out like a frightened rabbit.

In an instant M. Victor was after it, but he had scarce laid hands upon the fleeing figure when the man tumbled to the ground with a scream of terror.

"Don't kill me, Sperry," he whined in anguish, and the twisted face of Jasper Pilgrim showed plain in the moonlight as he knelt before M. Victor, his hands lifted as if in supplication.

"'T is the Quaker!" exclaimed the Frenchman, while I was so surprised that I could only stare, trying to guess what it all meant.

Our captive was the first to recover himself; for, seeing that it was the French gentleman and not Blundell, as he, too, had evidently expected, his courage suddenly returned and he rose quickly to his feet.

"So thee is in the plot to rob me, is thee?" he cried out in a rage. "Thee 's brought the girl with thee, I see."

"What were you doing in the spring-house?"

I demanded, for I thought he also must be aware of the secret passage.

"What does thee think I was doing?" he answered insolently. "Sampling the butter?"

"Answer Mademoiselle Travers, at once," M. Victor commanded, grasping the Quaker by the collar and raising his sword threateningly.

With a whine the man's manner changed, for there was that in monsieur's tone that brooked no trifling.

"I did but go in to see what Sperry's business there this morning was," he replied sullenly.

"This morning?" I echoed in astonishment.

"Aye, and I doubt not you knew it when you sent me on that fool's errand," Pilgrim went on. "I caught sight of him then, sneaking in. Where is he now?" he ended.

Our encounter with the Quaker had carried us a short distance past the spring-house and, as he asked this question, I looked instinctively toward it. I was just in time to see a dark shape, enveloped in a long cloak, appear on the threshold. In the moonlight the face showed white and distinct. This time I was not mistaken. This man was Captain Blundell.

CHAPTER XIX

A STOLEN HORSE

FOR a moment Blundell stood looking at me, evidently much surprised that I should be there; but the fear of what might be concealed beneath the folds of the dark cloak he wore brought me quickly to my senses.

"Monsieur, here is the man!" I cried, starting forward.

But Blundell was even quicker to recover himself, and darted out of the spring-house, turning sharply away from it and rounding the corner toward the dark shadow of the woods in the rear.

"Do not move, mademoiselle," called M. Victor, and I saw him run back of the house to intercept the fugitive while the mock Quaker sneaked off the moment he was released.

Of him I thought little. My whole interest was centered in the capture of the other man and, fearing that my feeble help might prove only

an embarrassment to the young Frenchman, I stood my ground, awaiting the outcome with a fast-beating heart.

A minute later I heard a half-smothered exclamation of anger from Blundell and the voice of M. Victor commanding him to halt. Thus I knew that they had met, but almost at the same moment the British Captain came running out into the moonlight, heading toward the maple grove.

"This way, monsieur," I cried at the top of my voice, instinctively following the fleeing man, and Monsieur Victor's answering shout of caution assured me he, too, was pursuing quickly, while the next instant he passed me on the run.

All the advantage was with Blundell, for so dark was it under the trees that one could not see a yard ahead, and although M. Victor reached the shadows but a few paces behind the other, he was unable to tell in which direction to go and paused an instant, giving me time to come up with him.

Then as we looked eagerly about, hoping that a movement or a sound would serve to guide us,

we heard a mocking laugh and the clatter of hoofs on the driveway.

"Ah, he has take' my horse, the rascal!" cried M. Victor, rushing into the darkness; but he was too late. Ere he reached the place he had left the beast, Blundell had galloped away, and we were helpless to stop him.

"Has he taken the boy?" I cried, still thinking of what might be concealed beneath the long cloak the man wore; but I waited not for the answer I knew M. Victor could not give.

"Go to the front door, monsieur," I went on. "I will open it presently," and without another word I ran back to the spring-house.

I was certain then that we had been too late. The dark, silent house seemed to make this conclusion the only possible one, and I was fearful of what awaited me inside.

I groped in the darkness until I found the secret entrance, plunged into the shallow water, scarce heeding its coldness, and made my way underground as rapidly as I could till I came to the narrow, rough stair. Up this I staggered, tripping over the uneven steps as I hurried on, conscious only of a heavy weight of anxiety.

At last I reached the top and bending down slipped past the great stone which masked the upper opening, and so on through the fireplace into the day-nursery. There was a tiny candle burning in the room, and I looked about me half-expecting to see something amiss, but all seemed as usual, and I tiptoed across toward the open door leading into the children's sleeping chamber.

Almost certain that I should find it empty, I peeped into Jacky's little white bed and there he lay, safe and sound! So great was my thankfulness and joy that I felt myself grow weak, and had to clutch at the door jamb to keep my balance. Whatever else had happened the children were all safe, for Marjory was in her crib, and, through the door beyond, I saw the baby's nurse sleeping soundly and knew Allen must be there too.

But why was Denewood so shut up? And why was the door not open to me? This was what was in my mind when a low murmur of voices reached me and I passed quietly into the upper gallery.

A small light burned in the lower hall as I

hurried to the banister and looked down. Mummer and his wife stood there talking together in low tones.

"'T is easy to buy more beer than you can drink," Mummer was saying doggedly. "Dick Shoemaker maketh ill bread. Jack Baker maketh poor shoon. I am a man of peace and no fighter, therefore I will not open the door to any one who rattleth at midnight."

"Midnight!" exclaimed Mrs. Mummer scornfully. "It has scarce struck ten yet—" but ere she finished I was down the stairs, and she was staring at me as if she saw a ghost.

"Have you no welcome for me?" I asked, halting at the lower landing.

They looked at me in astonishment, as well they might, seeing that they could have no notion how I got there, but Mrs. Mummer recovered herself and ran to me with outstretched arms.

"Oh, Peggy! My little Peggy! Have you come back to us?" she cried, with tears welling into her eyes.

"Yes, yes, I 'm here," I said, as well as I could, for she nigh smothered me in her embrace.

Mrs. Mummer drew away and looked at me,

vowing she scarce was sure I was flesh and blood, and would have begun on the thousand questions she had ready, but ere the first was out, a thundering knock on the front door echoed through the hall.

"'T is the third time to-night," Mummer whispered, looking uneasily at his wife.

"The third time?" I repeated. "I knocked but once."

"Not twenty minutes gone there was a summons," Mrs. Mummer explained, "while we were upstairs. 'T was that brought us down."

I was about to comment upon this, guessing that Blundell or Pilgrim must be at the bottom of it, when the knocker sounded once more, this time so persistently that I bethought myself.

"Why do you not open the door, Mummer?" I demanded, but he shook his head gloomily.

"I am a man of peace," he began, but I cut him short.

"Fiddlesticks!" I exclaimed, exasperated at his timidity. "I 'll go to it, then," and without further words I took down the chain and turned the lock with the great key.

An instant later the door was wide, and M.

Victor stood before us, his face flushed with anxiety, and his naked sword still in his hand. Of a sudden I realized that I had clean forgot him.

"Ah, mademoiselle," he cried, evidently relieved to see me, "I began to fear that—"

"Your pardon, monsieur," I begged. "I was so glad to find my little cousin safe that for the moment I remembered naught else."

"I am rejoice'," he answered, putting up his sword and stepping across the threshold. "The house was so silent that I fear' something might have happen' to you."

I made him known to Mrs. Mummer, explaining the service he had done me and, oh, how she beamed upon him,—but now that she had me safe back again and in no way harmed, she at once took thought of my health.

"Miss Peggy!" she exclaimed, looking down, "to see you in such case! Come at once and change your shoes and stockings. They are wringing wet."

"Nay, you stay and get M. de Soulange something to eat. I 'll be but a minute," I added to the young Frenchman, and hurried to my room, where for the first time in many days I had an

opportunity to rid myself of my ragged dress, albeit I made but a hasty toilet.

When I returned Mrs. Mummer had set out some cold meats and wine for M. Victor and I knew from the few words I heard that she had learned from him all he could tell of my adventures. Also that she liked the young Frenchman at first sight was plain to me who knew how to read her kindly face.

I found that I too was hungry and sat down to the table ready to munch and talk with a light heart, for my worst fears had been put to rest, and now that I knew Jacky was safe, my past experiences troubled me not at all.

"Tell me what took Bee and Cousin John to Delaware after me?" I asked, when Mrs. Mummer's curiosity had been partially satisfied.

" 'T was the thimble did it," she answered with a shake of her head. "I put no faith in it, but Miss Bee was mortal afeared of that Blundell."

"How did she know he was about?" I questioned.

"Did he not chase her on the road?" exclaimed Mrs. Mummer.

"Oh, to be sure," I answered, remembering.

"That was why Bee rode off in such a hurry. Of course!"

"Aye, that was it," Mrs. Mummer went on. "Mr. Mark he stopped the man and brought Miss Bee and the boy home safe enough; but when the thimble came—"

"What thimble?" I interrupted.

"No other than your own silver thimble that Miss Bee gave you when you were a wee thing," Mrs. Mummer explained. "When they had looked the country over for you and this Blundell as well, hearing naught of either, they were fair desperate about ye. Ah, dearie, 't was a sad time at Denewood. I don't know what Miss Bee would have done, but for the thought that that decent body Mrs. Pilgrim was at your side."

"Tell me about the thimble," I begged, for she was ready to cry at the mere recollection of my absence.

"It came with a note, scrawled on a bit of paper," she continued. "Miss Bee misdoubted it was your writing; but it said you were being carried south into Delaware and would be given up if certain provisions were agreed to, and that

the thimble was to show good faith. I never believed in it for a minute."

"Blundell managed to get hold of that thimble somehow," I said. "I missed it when I was at the Schneiders' farm."

"Aye, they guessed it was Blundell," Mrs. Mummer went on, "and that made it all the worse. Miss Bee could n't rest for thinking you were in the man's hands and knowing they were after that ring, bad luck to it."

"Oh!" I exclaimed, remembering. "Is my ring gone?" and I jumped to my feet.

"Nay, 't is in your powdering-box where Mr. Powell left it," Mrs. Mummer assured me positively. "I looked, after that old wretch got away from us."

"But why didn't you give it to him as my note said?" I demanded, for it might have made a vast difference had not M. Victor come to my aid.

"I would never give the old thief the ring," declared Mrs. Mummer stoutly.

"But you had my letter telling you to," I insisted.

"Aye, but you never writ it yourself, dearie,"

she answered, with a sly look. "'T was in your hand, that I saw, but the words were never yours, and I knew at once that that old wretch was no true Friend, so I meant to hold the deceiver till he led us to you."

"I should like to see this so wonderful ring, mademoiselle," said M. Victor with something more than curiosity in his voice.

"I 'll get it for you," I cried, and ran off to fetch it.

I tiptoed into the room for fear of waking the children, and lighting a candle, looked eagerly into my powdering-box, thinking how glad I would be to see my ring again; but it was not there. Puzzled for a moment I opened a gold snuffbox, that had been given me by a certain British Colonel Taunton when he was in command at Denewood, and which I used to hold patches, but again I was disappointed. Then like a flash it came to me. Blundell had taken it after all. Evidently upon his first visit in the morning, when Jasper Pilgrim had seen him, he had found the chance would not serve and had been obliged to return later.

With a pang of regret at the loss, I was still

thankful that the ring had been there, for otherwise the little boy sleeping peacefully in the next room might have been missing now.

"Blundell has the ring," I announced, on my return to the dining-room.

"'T is not possible," cried Mrs. Mummer. "'T was there this very afternoon."

"He took it not a half hour gone. But never mind, we have Jacky," I said. "I 'm sorry, monsieur, not to be able to show it to you. It was a very unusual ring."

"But what can this Captain Blondell want of it?" asked M. Victor. "I suppose he is not jus' a thief."

"'T is a long story, monsieur," I began, "but, briefly, it seems that a little boy has been lost and an advertisement for him, offering a reward has been put into a New York news-sheet. The child is to be identified by a strange ring which, in a curious way, came into my possession long ago. That is the part the ring plays, and that is why Blundell wishes to secure it. I overheard him say that any child about the same age would do, if he but held the ring, and I am a little troubled he may substitute another little boy for the

right one in the hope of obtaining this money. If I could but remember the name of the agent in New York I would warn him, but I have forgot it—and I fear the paper is lost."

"Was it not Andrew M'Sparren in Nassau Street?" M. Victor asked quietly.

"Why, yes," I cried, remembering perfectly now, and vastly astonished. "That is the name, but—monsieur, how did you know it?"

"It was I, mademoiselle, who advertise' for that little boy," he returned gravely.

I looked at the young Frenchman in amazement for a moment, scarce taking in all his announcement signified, then it flashed through my mind that here was the explanation of his having been in the company of Jasper Pilgrim.

"It was the search for the ring that brought you to the Schneider farm!" I exclaimed.

"Indeed, yes," he answered, "and it was because of it that you were keep a prisoner. It is mos' curious, though 't is scarce believable that you should have the right ring."

"It must be the right one," I said positively, then stopped to wonder if after all I was correct. Perhaps Blundell and Pilgrim were mistaken.

"And yet, monsieur," I went on hesitatingly, "I am not so sure, now that I think about it. I wish I had the ring to show you."

"Tell me what it was like?" he asked. "There are not two like the one I search for in all the worl'."

"It is a very massy ring of the bigness of my thumb," I began. "Around it are five triangular diamonds, and the great bezel holds a sapphire stone which hath on it, deeply cut, the figure of a youth with a bow. This seal I took to be an Indian when I was a child, but now I know 't is Cupid, the god of love. But there is no reson, whatever that is."

"It is nonetheless the ring I am in search of, mademoiselle!" M. Victor cried, scarce waiting till I half finished. "How came it into your possession?"

But ere I could answer, Mrs. Mummer put a stop to our talk.

"Nay, dearie, you must save that for the morn," she insisted. "'T is late, sir," she went on, appealing to M. Victor, "and I 'm sure you both need rest. Miss Peg is quite wore out."

"You are right, Meesis Mummer," he agreed,

and though I was willing enough to tell the story of Bee's wedding cake I had to content myself to wait till the morrow and was led away to bed, while Mummer looked after the young Frenchman's comfort.

CHAPTER XX

CLARINDA RUNS AWAY

MRS. MUMMER did not wake me the next morning and as a consequence it was late when I came downstairs to find that M. Victor had eaten his breakfast and was off with Mummer, looking over the estate.

"He is a most mannerly gentleman for a Frenchman," Mrs. Mummer confided to me, and to admit this much showed that she had taken a great liking to him.

"If it had not been for him I should not be here to-day," I told her, at which she took me in her arms and hugged me.

"I 'm so glad to be home!" I exclaimed, sitting down to my breakfast. "I only wish Bee and Cousin John were back. 'T will be a comfort to have the family together again. I saw the little ones as they went out with Sally just now,—but where is Jacky?" I ended, looking around the room.

"He 's off with Clarinda," Mrs. Mummer answered impatiently. "I warned her not to go too far from the house. She 's a silly wench and had I my way one of the men should be sent with the boy. But Miss Bee will have it that Clarinda can be trusted, and 't is not to be denied that she fair worships the lad."

Just as I had finished eating, M. Victor came in, looking very handsome, I thought, which made me glad I could appear before him in something better than rumpled rags.

"I have news, mademoiselle," he said with a gay little laugh. "You would scarce believe how polite your British Captain can be," and he handed me an open letter, which read as follows:

To Monsieur de Soulange, Squire of Dames:

Honored Sir—Having pressing business at some distance from Germantown, I found myself obliged to avail myself of the loan of your fine horse somewhat hurriedly last night. I regret that I cannot return it to you in person, but eventually I shall leave it with your agent, Andrew M'Sparren. It rejoices me to inform you that your search is at an end, one evidence of which closes this communication. Permit me, sir, to subscribe myself,

Your most obedient, humble and grateful servant,

GEORGE BLUNDELL.

Late Captain, His Majesty's Horse.

I read the note through twice before I quite made it out, for the writing was crabbed, and even when I knew the words I still was puzzled.

"What does it mean, monsieur?" I asked. "What is the 'evidence' which 'closes the communication'?"

"That you will see on the back of the letter, mademoiselle," he answered, and, upon turning it over, I found a wax seal stamped with a print from my missing ring.

"He has it!" I exclaimed. "He took it last night, as I thought."

"Nay, do not be distress'," said M. Victor, evidently seeing that I was far from pleased to lose my treasure. "He will sell it to McSparren and in due time it will be return' to you."

"Ah, but it is not mine," I hastened to reply. "Has he the little boy somewhere, do you think?"

"That I know not, mademoiselle," M. Victor answered. "I hope so, I am sure."

"I heard them plotting to substitute a child as soon as they had the ring," I explained, knowing that I had mentioned this before but wishing to impress it on him.

"Nay, that is impossible. They may try it but

they cannot succeed," M. Victor assured me; "but," he went on with a laugh, "you do not know yet the good joke on Blondell. The gallant late Captain of His Majesty's Horse have gone with my beast, but he knows not what he will fin' at the end of his journey. My servants, mademoiselle, are in New York—and Louis, my equerry, is not a patient man. When he see' Blondell ride up to McSparren's office on that horse, which he know like his own son, he will seize both the horse and the rider, thinking I have been rob' or worse. Oh, it will be merry for us—but I would not be in Blondell's shoes." He ended with a peal of laughter, in which, in spite of my perplexity, I could not help joining.

"And now, mademoiselle, please tell me how the ring came into your possession," he went on, checking his gaiety and becoming serious on the instant. "I was patient last night, for you were tire', but 't is not idle curiosity that make' me ask."

So I told him all about the wedding-cake, hoping he would have some explanation of how the ring came to be in it, but at the end he shook his head.

"It is most mysterious, mademoiselle," he said, thoughtfully; "shall I tell you why I am in America and what I know of the adventure' of the ring?"

"I should love to hear!" I exclaimed.

"'T is the strange story of a woman's foolishness," he began. "My father have a cousin in France. A very rich man with very great possession'. He is call' the Marquis de Soulange-Caderousse. For many year' my father have been look' upon as his heir; but, to every one's surprise, he marry. His wife may have been a very wise lady,"—M. Victor shrugged his shoulders—"I do not know. But she is not his equal in birth—that is certain. Well, one day in the hunting-field this cousin is kill' by an accident, an' my father is made the guardian of his only son—for the dead man he love my father and trust' him in everything."

The young man paused a moment and lifted his head proudly.

"The woman," he went on, "my cousin's wife that is, she did not know the honor of our family and she had some bad adviser', who tol' her that my father would never let a baby to live that

stand between him and a so great inheritance. Then she, too, die'; an' her family with a great foolishness, send the little marquis out of the country to Canada in the care of her brother."

"And this is the child you are looking for," I interrupted excitedly. "And he is a marquis?"

"Aye, truly," replied M. Victor. "He is now the Marquis de Soulange-Caderousse."

"But why did they send the child to Canada?" I asked.

"Ah, because they were a very foolish people," he replied. "They take him away because, as they said publicly, they fear my father will destroy him for the sake of the money. A slur upon my father's honor which he cannot suffer, mademoiselle. So, when he first learn' of it, he sen' a man to America to bring back the little boy. But this man, though he was a trusted servant, bungle' the business, and all he succeed' in doing is to drive the uncle of the little boy deeper into the wilderness until it is impossible to fin' them."

"Aye, 't would be like looking for a needle in a hay-stack," I murmured, unconsciously quoting Mummer.

"It seem' impossible," M. Victor went on, "but my father could not res' satisfied and sen' again after that first man come back to report failure, but just then the uncle of the boy return' from Canada without the child."

"What had he done with him?" I broke in.

Again M. Victor shrugged.

"He insis' that the child have been steal from him," he said with something of an effort. "And, to make it worse, he accuse' my father's agents of employing the Indians to do it."

The young Frenchman drew in his breath sharply and looked straight out of the window for a moment or two.

"That was an outrage," I murmured sympathetically, for I saw that the young man felt the matter keenly.

"It was black infamy!" he cried, "but worse was to come. This man demand' of my father, that he be pay to keep quiet. To not to talk, you understan', and when my father, he refuse with indignation, this scoundrel go away and tell his tale far and wide. It is known my father have sen' men to America, and there are always some ready to believe the meanes' lies; so there was

a great scandal which hurt my father to the heart."

He paused for a moment.

"He blame' himself for that he have not undertake the search in person, but he grow ill and cannot travel. He is now an invalid for almost a year, and I am come in his place to clear the family name and take back the child; for I am sure that not until the boy is found, will my father recover. It is so with us. The honor of our family is very dear to the Soulanges."

"And have you any news of the boy?" I asked after a moment's silence.

"Yes, and no," M. Victor replied. "I have foun' trace' of the man in Canada after he fall into the hands of the Indians who take the boy from him—"

"Indians," I interrupted, thinking at once of Tiscoquam and also of the remark I had heard Pilgrim make. "Did they keep the ring?"

"No, the man manage' to conceal that," M. Victor replied, "and he escape', leaving the child to the mercies of the savages, and make his way south as best he could through the forest'. When at last he comes to towns and villages,

many times he is without food and hungry, and he was tempt' to sell the ring for he lacked money—but always he keep it, thinking to make more in another way."

"In another way," I broke in, not understanding.

"Ah, yes; he was a rascal!" M. Victor exclaimed. "He think to find those in France who would pay a high good price for news that the child was dead, and the ring would seem to prove his words."

"But he must have parted with it finally," I remarked.

"He los' it, mademoiselle," M. Victor continued. "So he tol' me, though at the time I do not believe. Now perhaps it is true after all. He recount' that he follow' an old Indian trail that lead him into Pennsylvania not far from Philadelphia, and being as he said nigh starving he stop at a fine mansion. There he tell something of his tale and brag of being uncle to the heir of finer estates than that, even while he beg food among the servants of the house at the back door. These laugh at the story of a lost marquis; and in anger, and to prove his boast, he

show' the ring. But remember 't is his story, mademoiselle.

"While he hol' the ring in his hand, some one, in their rough play, strike his arm and out of his hand fly the ring. That is all! It is gone."

"Did they not search for it?" I asked in wonder. "Perchance it fell in the grass if they were out of doors."

"They were in a paved court, mademoiselle,—or so the man insis'," M. Victor explained, "yet no one hear' the ring fall. Nor could they fin' it, though it should have been plain to see. It soun' most curious, and I did not believe his tale."

"And the ring was never found then?" I questioned incredulously.

"Not by him," said M. Victor with a smile. "This man and the servants about the estate hunt diligently, though naught come' of it. Indeed after a time the other' insis' that each be search', and still no ring could they fin'. But the man, angered at his loss continue' to accuse them of thievery, which bring on a quarrel in the mids' of which a woman come to the door of the kitchens and drive them away."

"The kitchens!" I gasped. "Monsieur, there

is a paved court beside the Denewood kitchens. You remember we passed that way last night going to the spring-house. Could it be there the quarrel happened? I must ask Mrs. Mummer."

I called in the old housekeeper and, after telling her something of the story, inquired if she remembered any such circumstance.

"Nay, now, dearie, how could I and it nigh six years gone?" she replied. "A quarrel among the black boys is not so unusual that I would keep it in mind."

"But how could the ring have gotten into the cake even if the man lost it at Denewood?" I demanded.

Mrs. Mummer wrinkled her forehead, trying to recall past happenings.

"There was so much going on just before the wedding," she said, turning to M. Victor, as if in apology for not being able to explain the matter forthwith, "but hold a minute," she continued a little excitedly. "Now I mind 't was Indian summer and the window was open beside the table where I was mixing the cake. Could the ring have flown in that way when my back was turned, and I never know it?"

"That must have been it," declared M. Victor positively, "and the man tol' the truth after all. It seem' to me like Fate have take' a hand to bring the ring to you, mademoiselle."

Whether or not this was the true explanation of the ring's finding its way into Bee's wedding-cake, no other has ever been forthcoming; but to this day I cannot give over thinking how strange it was that a man should carry the ring safe for miles, through a wilderness of forest, straight to Denewood and there, by a curious misfortune, lose it as he did. It seemed, as M. Victor suggested, something more than accident.

"And now, monsieur, I have lost it too!" I exclaimed a little sadly.

"The ring will be recover', mademoiselle," he said with assurance. "We know where it is now, and I shall soon be after the man who has it, but the little boy, my cousin—I wish I were more sanguine of finding him."

"We must find him!" I exclaimed. "We must find him!"

"You make me hopeful," he replied with a smile, "if you will assis'."

But what could I do? I had spoken out of the fullness of my heart, being sorry for the young Frenchman's anxieties, yet what aid could a maid give, when so diligent a search had been going on for years without result?

"I fear I shall be of little help, monsieur," I said despondently.

"At leas' you give me courage to continue the search," he answered.

"There may be more than that in it," said Mrs. Mummer, shaking her head solemnly. "There 's some meaning to it, though what it is I never could make out. But something more is bound to come of it. Mark my words!"

We might have talked on this subject for hours, but we were suddenly silenced by the sound of some one calling, and a moment later Clarinda burst into the room, panting from running and with a face nigh ashen with fear.

"Oh, Mis' Mummer, ma'am," she sobbed, falling on the floor at the old housekeeper's feet, "he's done took! He 's done took!"

"What are you talking about, Clarinda?" demanded Mrs. Mummer sharply.

"He 's done took!" the girl repeated wildly.

"Who is taken?" I exclaimed, grasping her shoulder.

"Li'l' Mars Jacky," she blubbered. "A big Injun come along in the woods and done took him!"

CHAPTER XXI

AN UNEXPECTED RETURN

IT was not without considerable difficulty that we calmed Clarinda sufficiently for her to tell her story. Only severe threats from Mrs. Mummer brought her to her senses, for she was so wrought up by fear and distress at the loss of Jacky that she could scarce control herself.

"Indeed, Mis' Mummer, ma'am," she sobbed, "I weren't gwin' far, nohow. We was jus' playin' by the big spring over in the West woods an' Mars Jacky he was the fust to see the red Injun. All painted up he was, with feathers in his hair, and a necklace, and that frightful I could 'a' dropped, 'case I never was partial to them savages, nohow, and I could feel my wool a-risin' at the back of my neck like he was gwin to scalp Clarinda."

"Tell us what happened," Mrs. Mummer broke in, shaking the girl to emphasize her words.

"Never mind your wool. Did the Indian take the boy?"

"Yes 'm, that 's what he done done," Clarinda blubbered. "Leastways I called Mars Jacky to run away; but he would n't, ma'am, and the Injun he come up and took little Mars by the hand, saying somethin' about a-huntin' deer and—and when I looked back they was nowhere to be seen."

"Then you ran away!" I cried.

"Yes 'm, Miss Peggy. I jus' run to get help, 'case I knew I could n't do nothin', an' I runned all the way never stoppin' an instant, and that 's the truf, Mis' Mummer, ma'am, 'deed 't is."

"Where are the other children?" demanded Mrs. Mummer, starting toward the door.

"They 's down to the summer house, ma'am, with Easter and the white nurse," replied Clarinda.

"We must have them in at once," Mrs. Mummer vowed, and would have gone forthwith to summon them had I not stopped her.

"Nay, there 's no danger in that quarter," I told her, feeling certain I knew what had happened. "Marjory and Allen are perfectly safe. 'T is only Jacky the Indian wants. Send for

Bill Schmuck. We must waste no time. Get up, Clarinda," I went on to the girl, who was still on the floor, sobbing as if her heart would break, "you must take Mr. Bill to where you saw the boy last."

Mrs. Mummer went immediately to find Bill and Clarinda, after some further urging, rose to her feet.

"You all don't want me to go back to them woods, does you?" she whimpered.

"Of course I do," I insisted; "it will save a lot of time, so don't be silly. There are no Indians about here that will hurt you."

She looked up, and as she did so I saw her eyes widen, her mouth drop open in frightened amazement, and, with a trembling finger, she pointed out of the window behind me.

"Look, Missy Peg, there 's the Injun now!" and with a shriek she collapsed again at my feet.

I turned, and on the lawn I saw a savage, wrapped in his blanket, stalking toward the house. As he came nearer I recognized him at once. It was Tiscoquam.

"Come, monsieur," I cried, "here is the Indian who has taken the boy," and I led the way

through the front door and out on to the lawn, full of eagerness to meet my old enemy.

He stopped in his tracks as he saw us coming and waited till we reached him, making, as he stood there, a strange picture and one that was not devoid of a certain dignity.

"Where is the boy, Tiscoquam?" I demanded as I faced him.

"He is safe," replied the Indian passively.

"You must give him to me," I began, and would have continued, but he held up his hand as a signal for silence.

"Make the magic sign," he said, pointing to his wrist where the blurred mark of the seal was still visible on the white band around his arm. "Show it to Tiscoquam and he will give you the boy."

At this my heart sank, for I had not the ring and knew not when I would be able to obtain it.

"But, Tiscoquam," I began hesitatingly, "I have it not."

"It is well," he answered indifferently, with a gesture that seemed to dismiss the subject, and took a step back as if to go away.

"Wait!" I cried; "let us talk more of these

things. Perchance I can find the sign for you."

He halted obediently, and I turned to M. Victor.

"He seeks the ring," I explained; "that is the sign of which he speaks."

"Alas, we have it not," said M. Victor regretfully. "But we have the seal, mademoiselle!" he exclaimed hopefully. "Might not that serve with the savage?"

"Oh, let me have it," I begged, overjoyed at the suggestion, and he handed me the missive he had received that morning from Blundell.

"See, Tiscoquam," I went on, turning to the Indian and holding the paper with the wax impression before him, "will you give me the boy in exchange for this?"

Stolidly he took it from me and looked at it closely, passing his finger over the raised figure with a show of astonishment, but at length he handed it back to me.

"Let the pale-face maiden make the sign," he grunted, and once more he held out his wrist with its wide band of white.

Alas! the wax seal would not serve for this, and I shook my head disconsolately.

"I cannot make it now," I acknowledged, at which the brave turned from me, evincing considerable satisfaction.

"False magic," he muttered. "Think not to trick Tiscoquam. He knows the true sign when he sees it and will be content with no other."

"I had not thought to trick you, Tiscoquam," I told him. "This is not false magic, though I cannot make you understand. And what is in your heart? Is it to exchange the magic sign for the boy?"

But he was unwilling or unable to explain himself, and seemed impatient to be off.

"Assure him we will get the ring," suggested M. Victor.

"You must come again, Tiscoquam," I said. "Then I will make the mark for you and you will give me the boy."

"Tiscoquam returns to his brothers in the north," he answered, showing no disposition to yield to my request.

"You must not take the boy with you," I protested.

"Failing the magic sign he goes with Tiscoquam," the Indian replied imperturbably.

"But you must give us time," I besought him. "I knew not that you would want the sign."

"That is true talk," he admitted grudgingly, then after a moment's thought, "in three suns Tiscoquam comes again."

At least I had gained that much grace and was ready to let the savage go, but by this time Bill Schmuck and Mrs. Mummer had appeared upon the scene.

"Nay, Miss Peg, you 'll never leave the child with that savage for three days," that worthy woman burst out indignantly. "Think of him in the woods, with never a dry change nor a fresh pair of shoes—and not so much as a nighty! Give up the child, ye heathen," she ended, glaring at Tiscoquam.

" 'T is no use to call names, Mrs. Mummer," I cautioned, knowing well that the Indian's intentions toward Jacky were not unfriendly and seeing that our best means of getting the boy back was through the ring. "We may lose all if we are too impatient. 'Overhaste churns bad butter,' as Mummer says," I ended, the saying popping into my head.

"Miss Peg's quite right," agreed Bill Schmuck

in an undertone. "Anger him not, lest he spirit the boy away into the forest where it would take us days to find him."

"Well, at least ask the creature how the child fares," groaned Mrs. Mummer.

"Is the Eaglet well, Tiscoquam?" I inquired to pacify her, though she had seen him scarce an hour before.

"All is well with the Eaglet," the Indian answered with dignity. "In his heart there is still love for his red brother of the forest. He is with his own people."

"Then in three days you will come again," I said, seeing little use in detaining him further.

"In three suns Tiscoquam comes once more," he answered, and without another word he turned and stalked away.

"You will not let him go?" cried M. Victor, starting forward as if he, too, would restrain the Indian.

"Aye, let him go, sir," said Bill Schmuck. "'T would do no good to hold him. He 'd ne'er say a word. E'en torture will not drag aught from one of these savages. I 'll follow him, and if once I find his camp we 'll have the boy back

"See, Tiscoquam, will you give me the boy in exchange for this?"

if it takes a regiment," and he moved away ready to take up the trail as soon as Tiscoquam was far enough in the woods not to know he was being tracked.

"Three mortal days ere we have the little man back," mourned Mrs. Mummer. "'T is a blessing Miss Bee 's from home."

"'T is the only thing to be glad of," I assented, "and we must have Jacky here when she comes. Think you, you can find the ring, monsieur?" I added, appealing to the young Frenchman.

"If you will let me have a horse, mademoiselle, I will start at once for New York," he answered. "I have no doubt the man is now en route to my agent, expecting in some way to secure the reward."

We hurried back to the house, sending word to the stables to have a horse saddled for M. Victor, and Mrs. Mummer went off to the kitchens to put up a lunch against the journey; but she had scarce left the room when she was back again with a long face.

"Oh, Miss Peg," she moaned, "it never rains but it pours. 'Troubles never come singly,' as Mummer says. They 'll be back this afternoon."

"Back! Who?" I demanded.

"Master John and Miss Bee," she answered. "They were in Philadelphia last night and sent word ahead of their coming. Mummer has just had a message. And the boy gone! What shall we do?"

Of a sudden all my courage left me and had Mrs. Mummer and I been alone I doubt not we should have wept then and there; but M. Victor's presence kept our eyes dry though our hearts were heavy indeed.

"'T will be a sad homecoming for Bee," I sighed.

"Aye, there you're right," answered Mrs. Mummer gloomily. "I never thought to see the day when I would hear with sorrow that the Master and Mistress of Denewood were on their way back to us."

CHAPTER XXII

A HUNT FOR THE RING

FOR a time this news of Bee's coming robbed me of all my courage. I had hoped to have the boy at home again ere she returned, but now, in a few hours, I must tell her that little Jack was gone.

"I am so sorry, mademoiselle," M. Victor said sympathetically. "I suppose your man knew best, having experience with these wild people, but it did seem to me we might have learn' something had we held the savage."

"Nay, he would not have spoken a word had we made him a prisoner, monsieur," I answered. "They are a strange people, and it will not be so bad if only Tiscoquam keeps his word. But suppose he changes his mind and takes the boy north with him at once? And that he will do if we threaten him." Already I was fretting myself into a fever of fear at the thought of what might happen.

"But your man will fin' their camp, will he not?" M. Victor questioned.

"Yes, I think so, but the boy may not be there," I explained. "They know the forest so well that they could hide him completely if they wished. There are many things they might do, monsieur —and they are savages."

"Nay, you must not torture yourself by brooding upon unhappy possibilities," M. Victor insisted gently; "let us rather hope that something may delay your cousins upon the road long enough for me to fin' the ring before their return."

"Ah, monsieur, when you know Madam Travers you will understand that naught will keep her from her children when she is so near."

"Even so, mademoiselle," M. Victor urged, "Madame Travers is, I am sure, too wise to despair where there is so much hope. And you also must keep a glad face to help her, so let us not dwell on this matter but think of other things. It is my part to bring you the ring in three days. Let us talk of that. I but wait the return of your man Schmuck to start out, if you will let me have that horse."

"Of course, monsieur,—but where will you go?" I asked.

"First with all speed to Norristown, stopping on the way at the house where I met you, mademoiselle," he answered, speaking with a certain assurance which gave me courage. "I look firs' for Pilgrim from whom I will get news of his partner, Blondell. I must confess I thought the Quakers a different sort of people," he ended with a slight laugh.

"Oh, monsieur, you must not judge the Society of Friends by that man," I hastened to assure him. "He 's no true Quaker, but one of the many trimmers in the land who pretended to be Friends to escape the charge of cowardice for not joining our army during the war, and also to make sure of being on the right side whoever won."

"So that is it," said M. Victor, nodding thoughtfully.

"Well, in this case perchance 't is better that we have a rascal to deal with, for we may expect him to betray his accomplice—and I mean to have the ring. Be sure of that."

"Oh, I hope so," I replied; "but what is a ring

with a reson?" I asked, of a sudden remembering the advertisement.

"Do you not know?" he questioned in evident surprise.

"Nay, I know not even what a reson is," I confessed, not realizing at the moment how easily he had led my thoughts away from my troubles.

"And yet it is your own language that has the saying, 'without rime or reson,' " he laughed.

"Now what has that to do with it?" I asked him.

"Only this, mademoiselle," he responded. "In the old days, rings that were exchanged between fren's—" he hesitated a moment, "or lovers," he added, "often had some pretty sentiment within them. This might be a rime or it might be in plain prose. In other words, a reson."

"But my ring has no such saying in it," I said positively.

"Ah, has it not?" M. Victor laughed lightly. "Mayhap some day I shall have the honor to instruc' you about that ring, mademoiselle. Though you have wear it for years and I have never, never wear it at all."

"Then how do you know so much about it?" I asked, greatly interested. My ring was ever close to my heart and my imagination never tired of weaving romances about it. And here was another mystery of which I had not guessed.

"It is like this," said M. Victor. "This ring have been in dispute in our family for years and years. The father of the late Marquis de Soulange-Caderousse say it belong' to his branch of the house. My gran'father claim it is to us. But *they* have possession of it, so, while there is much talk about it and all its peculiarities are common knowledge, I have seen it seldom, and since I was a little lad it have been los' with the young marquis."

"Ah," I suggested wisely, "think you not 't was the title made the old Marquis so arrogant? We have those among us here even now, who wish we were still English and love to bow and scrape to a 'Lord' or a 'Sir,' while great men like Doctor Franklin and his Excellency, General Washington, are neglected."

"Nay, I cannot believe that!" exclaimed M. Victor. "They are both such wise men. Paris loves Doctor Franklin to this day."

"'T is more than Philadelphia does," I burst out. "Not long ago Bee and I were on our way to drink a dish of tea with him when we met a pert Miss who told us 'it was no longer fashionable to visit him.' But I am glad to say that both his and his Excellency's birthdays were celebrated publicly this year."

"The generations to come will remember, mademoiselle," M. Victor assured me earnestly. "When we are gone, when many we now think famous are forgotten, the names of Doctor Franklin and General Washington will be housekeep' words in this great country— But we have travel' far from your ring. You remember that I spoke of a controversy between the families about the ownership of it? Well, the late marquis (he have a wicked title too, mademoiselle), he have the grace to make restitution, for he leave the ring in his will to my father's oldest son—which is me—so that all breach in the family shall be heal'."

"Oh, you will stand up for them, seeing that you come from a country where titles are common, but we good Americans hold them in small favor," I answered with some asperity. "I am

glad your ring is yours once more, but I cannot think a handle to his name makes a better man. It but serves to make him conceity when he has naught else to be proud of."

M. Victor laughed at this sally much more than it seemed to warrant, but an interruption put the matter out of my head.

"Miss Peggy," cried Mrs. Mummer, entering the room in haste, "here 's a lad wanting to see you, from what I can make out of his outlandish speech."

Behind her came Mummer, leading a gangling youth with a shock of red hair, whom I recognized at once as Otto Pilgrim.

"Do you wish to see me?" I asked, going to him.

"Nein! Nein!" he answered, grinning and winking at me as if we had some huge joke between us.

I looked to Mummer for an explanation, but he shook his head dolefully.

"You can't clear coffee with an addled egg," the old steward muttered. " 'T is useless to expect sense from a simpleton, Miss Peggy," he added.

"Have you a message for me?" I asked, again addressing the boy.

"Ja! Ja!" he burst out delightedly, and fumbling in his pocket he produced a letter which he handed to me. It was from his mother and read as follows:

Mistress Margaret Travers, of Denewood in Germantown.

Honored Miss: My husband Jasper Pilgrim repenteth him of his actions toward thee, for which his wife is truly thankful and grateful. He bids me inform thee that thy ring is in the hands of one Friend Sperry who is now upon the road to New York to an Agent named M'Sparren, thus cheating said Jasper Pilgrim out of his just and due reward. This information he sends thee gratis, knowing thy great interest in the ring, and he hopeth thee may frustrate the villain Sperry who keepeth not his sworn word.

For myself I beg you will forgive a woman who promised upon her marriage in the church to obey her husband, which led her into a matter in which she had no heart and which accorded ill with her well known honest dealings.

Thy humble, ob'd't servant,

KETURAH PILGRIM.

I read the letter aloud and at the end M. Victor clapped his hands.

"Good, mademoiselle," he cried. "I can al-

most find it in my mind to forgive that false Quaker. Now I can promise you the ring in three days or less."

I told Mrs. Mummer to give Otto some goodies and he went away with Mummer, halting a moment at the door to give me a final wink before he disappeared slowly beyond the jamb, withdrawing his head last like the old tortoise he always reminded me of.

M. Victor's preparations for departure now went forward quickly, but although he protested he had but just finished breakfast, Mrs. Mummer made him sit down to take another bite against the coming journey.

He talked confidently as he hurried with his eating, seeming glad of the opportunity to serve us.

" 'When thieves fall out,' as you have the saying, mademoiselle," he said laughingly, but the words were scarce out of his mouth ere he stopped, listening, then jumped to his feet as the sound of hoof-beats on the driveway came to us.

"Is it my horse?" he asked.

"Nay, yours must have been waiting for some time, and this is more than one," I replied, rising,

for now the noise of several animals was quite plain.

"'T is Bee," I said to myself, my hand going to my heart. Instead of delaying, they had come sooner than we had expected. How could I tell her that her boy was gone?

An instant later there was a sharp knock on the front door, and old Sam shuffled to answer it while I stood awaiting Bee's first words to make certain what I most dreaded.

Instead there came a volley of French, spoken by a man who demanded in no uncertain terms, "Monsieur le Vicomte!"

"'T is Louis, my equerry," exclaimed M. Victor, starting for the door. Small wonder he had chuckled at my contempt for men with titles when all the while he had one himself!

As I followed him I heard old Sam grumbling:

"'T ain't no manner o' use sayin' all them cuss words at me, sir. I don't know what you all means no mor'n if you all was a-talkin' Hessian. Mr. John Travers, Esquire, he lives here—" but by this time we were at the door, and in the portico stood four men.

In front was a fierce looking, mustachioed

French servitor, who, on the instant he saw M. Victor, stepped back and saluted. Behind him were two others of like stamp, and between them, evidently a prisoner, stood Captain George Blundell.

"Ah, ha!" cried M. Victor gaily, "did I not say, mademoiselle, that Louis would reco'nize my horse? 'T is well done, my children," he went on in French to his servants, each of whom was old enough to be his father. "But how came you to find me here? The good McSparren grew alarmed because I did not return, eh?—"

"I can explain that," Blundell broke in angrily. "I met your fools of servants as I traveled through the Jerseys and they were not willing simply to take the horse, but must needs detain me also, till they had seen you. I guessed this would be the place to find you and led them here to be the more quickly rid of them."

"You shall have the welcome you deserve, sir," said M. Victor grimly, "and if you are dispose' to play the gentleman for once you may soon go your way."

"Play the gentleman," cried Blundell in hot anger. "I like not the tone you take, Monsieur

le Vicomte, and will hold you accountable for your slur upon my honor."

"Your honor!" exclaimed the young Frenchman, but without raising his voice. "Think you I would bare my sword to fight with such as you? In my own country the horse boys would be set to whip you out of the place— And you like not the tone I take? Bien, monsieur, I like not that you take my horse without leave. Nor do I like the way you have treat' Mademoiselle Travers in the matter of a certain ring. However, the restoration of that will save you from the little beating at the hands of my servants which I hold for you."

"'T is well to have hired bullies to do what you would ne'er dare attempt yourself," Blundell sneered. "And as to your ring, you must e'en find it without my aid. 'T is a souvenir I shall retain in memory of the young lady who gave it to me. Egad, 't would scarce be a gallant act to part with it too readily."

For a moment M. Victor looked at me in wonderment, but I was too angry at Blundell's hints to heed him.

"You forced it from me, sir," I cried out.

"There is naught in the world I would give you of my own free will. Monsieur," I went on, turning to M. Victor, "can you not have the man searched at once? He must have the ring upon his person."

"It shall be done, mademoiselle," M. le Vicomte answered, "unless he giv' it to us de bonne volonté."

"Nay," retorted Blundell; "find it yourself—an you can!"

At a word from his master Louis seized his captive and took him inside the house for a thorough search. Meanwhile we waited impatiently on the portico, but when at length they came forth again, one look at Blundell told me all too plainly that the search had failed. He was more insolent than ever and smiled evilly.

"And now may I be permitted to proceed upon my journey?" he asked. "Or have you some other indignity you wish to subject me too, seeing that you have a sufficient number of servants at hand to protect you?"

M. Victor questioned Louis, who answered regretfully that he could find naught upon the man.

This was a keen disappointment to me, for if

Blundell was no longer in possession of the ring the hope of finding it within the three days was at an end. Before there had always been this anticipation to temper for Bee the fact that little Jack was in the Indian's hands; now, if even this was gone, what comfort could we hold out to her and where should we look for the missing trinket?

"I scarce know what to do, mademoiselle," M. Victor whispered to me privately. "But I can see no use in holding the man. It may be best to let him go and follow secretly, hoping he will lead us to the hiding-place of the ring."

I was too near to tears to answer, so I nodded agreement, and the young Frenchman, with a curt word, told the prisoner that he could depart.

But Captain Blundell, seeing that he had the upper hand, was more insolent than ever, and, stepping close to me, swept me a bow and then turned his back upon me with intentional disrespect.

'T was then I noted his manner of hair dressing for the first time.

He wore no wig, and his dark hair was drawn

back into a coarsely netted queue-bag, and in a flash a thought came to me.

"T-t-there!" I stuttered, so excited was I. "T-t-there 's w-w-where he h-h-has it h-h-hid," and I pointed to his queue.

"What mean you, Miss Peggy," cried Mrs. Mummer, who had come out from the house and was quite alive to the seriousness of the situation.

"I mean the queue-bag!" I exclaimed. "Have they looked there?"

At a word from M. Victor, Louis explained that they had not taken the bag off for the reason that the mesh was so open that, were the ring placed within it, it must fall through.

"But please look," I begged, for I was convinced that it lay there, and a glance at Blundell served to confirm this, for his face had grown scarlet with rage and he had started down the steps with a rough word on his lips.

"Seize the man," ordered M. le Vicomte, and Louis dragged his reluctant captive back to the portico.

"You pack of cowards," roared Blundell, and

twisting himself free from Louis he sprang toward M. Victor.

"Will you fight?" he shouted.

"It would be a poor return for Monsieur Travers' hospitality to brawl before his house," said the young Frenchman coolly. "Nor do I need to prove my valor on such as you."

But Blundell, doubly enraged at his contempt, leaped forward and struck him across the face with the back of his hand.

"Now will you fight!" he cried, "or will you still hide behind your servants?" and he whipped out his sword.

"Back, Louis! Back, François!" M. Victor ordered, as his servants started toward Blundell, "vous êtes trop tard," and even as he spoke his sword met the British captain's and the ring of steel filled the air.

CHAPTER XXIII

A QUESTION OF STRATEGY

SO suddenly had the clash between the two men come that they were hard at it ere the rest of us realized what was going forward. But the sharp hiss of the swords as they met brought us to our senses, and Mrs. Mummer, with a little shriek of terror, dragged me back out of the way. She would have had me run into the house, but I would not. It would have seemed like deserting M. Victor, who was brought to this quarrel on my account; so I stood apart and watched, scarce conscious that I even breathed.

Sword play was no new thing to us at Denewood, but heretofore I had witnessed only practice bouts between Cousin John and Allen McLane, both of whom were reckoned very skilful. This, however, was a different matter, for Blundell at least was in deadly earnest and would kill the young Frenchman if he could.

And I, who knew naught of M. Victor's skill

with the sword, could not help but be a little fearful for the outcome. He was scarce more than a boy, slight, graceful and, to my thinking, very handsome, but he seemed not to have the strength to combat his older and more rugged antagonist, who, from the very beginning, pressed the fight fiercely, putting all his weight into his attack and forcing M. Victor back a pace or two by the very fury of his onslaught.

If Blundell had counted upon discomposing the young man by this fury he was much mistaken. M. Victor, angry for an instant at the blow, had cooled almost as quickly and a smile came to his lips as his sword met unerringly the heavy thrusts of Blundell.

"Does Monsieur think he chop' down a tree?" he cried out gaily, as Blundell lunged with fearful desperation. "Monsieur is perchance more skilful with an ax."

So he went on defending himself with apparent ease, and all the while goading Blundell into a state of fury by his taunting remarks, though the Englishman said no word in reply but only fought the more desperately.

How long the combat lasted I know not. I

watched the play of swords, scarce conscious of Louis and the other servants, standing alert with their weapons bared in their hands ready to guard their master at the first sign of treachery, but making no move to interfere. At one corner of the portico old Sam crouched with two or three of our Denewood servants, muttering among themselves. Mrs. Mummer, beside me, seemed as fascinated as I, and after her first protest said no further word of my leaving the spot.

For a time no change was apparent in the combat. Blundell pressed the fighting and M. Victor defended himself coolly. But in a little the British captain began to pant for breath and behind his blade there was a lack of its former force. I looked searchingly at him, noting that his expression of anger gave place to anxiety and, as he began to tire from his vain effort to pierce the defense of the young Frenchman, a hint of fear grew in his eyes.

"Ah, monsieur," cried M. Victor, "your ax grow' heavy, eh? And yet the tree still stan's."

He laughed a little, joyously, as if he were having the very happiest time imaginable, then suddenly there came a change.

"Come," he said sternly, "this grow' monotonous. You must strive to keep me amuse'," and in an instant he became the aggressor, and his bright sword began to play about Blundell like a flame. Never had I dreamed of such mastery of the weapon as the young Frenchman displayed. In a moment the Englishman was helpless before a blade that darted in and out like lightning, and all the while his young opponent laughed gaily.

Step by step the one-time British captain gave ground, panting like a thirsty dog, tired, beaten, and fearful that the next thrust would pass his feeble guard.

"Nay, do not fear," cried M. le Vicomte. "Think you I would put a blot upon a good sword by staining it with your blood? Ah, no! I could have kill' you a dozen times an' I had like', but this is a better way with such as you!" and with a short, sharp twist Blundell's sword was wrenched out of his hand and flew singing across the lawn.

"Take the dog away, Louis," said M. Victor to his equerry. "And see that he comes not back again."

In a twinkling of the eye the contest had ended and I stood dumb till Louis started to lead Blundell away.

"Oh, the ring," I cried. "Pray don't forget the ring!"

Evidently Louis understood that much English, for, without waiting for a command from his master, he snatched the queue-bag from off Blundell's head.

"Voilà, monsieur le Vicomte!" he cried, holding it toward me. "Voilà! C'est extraordinaire, n'est-ce pas?" and I ran to look.

I held out my hand, for I took a childish pleasure in the thought of being the one to give the ring to M. Victor, and Louis presented me with the queue-bag with the ring inside. It was the bag which had drawn forth the exclamation of surprise, for it had within it a very finely netted sack of human hair the color of Blundell's, which had served to keep safe and conceal anything put therein. I noted the cleverness of the device, but at last I held my precious ring again and to the joy I felt at that and all it meant to me, was added the recollection that it belonged to the gallant French gentleman beside me.

"Monsieur," I said, handing it to him, "all I regret is that I did not keep it more safely for you."

"Mademoiselle," he answered with a low bow, "your regret' are as nothing to mine. I shall ever think with shame that I los' my temper in the presence of a so sweet lady."

"You could not help it!" I exclaimed. "I w-w-would n't have f-forgiven you if you h-h-had n't."

"It was the blow, mademoiselle, that for the minute made me forget myself," then as if this reminded him of Blundell, he turned suddenly and looked at the man still standing with his head dropped to his breast. "Louis," he cried sternly, "mus' I tell you twice to take that man away? Mus' I remind you that you let a thief strike your master? Take him away and start him on the road. I care not to remember that I have cross' swords with such as he; though, to be sure, he fences like—like what he is," and with that the young man turned to me once more, all smiles. "Let us forget, mademoiselle, that there are such people in the world." And when I looked that way again Blundell had disappeared and I know

not to this day what disposition Louis made of him.

"And now, mademoiselle, we must fin' the boy ere his mother returns," M. Victor went on with a smile. "We have the ring. All that remains is to encounter the Indian."

"Oh, if only we could get Jacky back before Bee comes," I exclaimed as we went into the house. "But we can do naught till Bill Schmuck returns, monsieur."

"I shall send Dave after him," said Mrs. Mummer, who had followed us, and she went off forthwith.

So many things had happened that morning since I left my bed that it seemed much time must have elapsed, but in reality scarce half an hour had passed since Clarinda had brought the news of Jacky's disappearance.

This fact I discovered as I glanced at the tall clock in the hall.

"We have nigh the whole morning left," I cried joyfully, "and Cousin John said they would not return till afternoon. If only we had recovered the ring before Tiscoquam came," I ended with a regretful sigh.

"Nay now, do not lose your courage just as you are winning," said M. Victor cheerfully; "we shall fin' the boy in time. You 'll see. Fate is on our side."

"Do you really think so?" I questioned, grateful for his encouragement.

"Of course I do," he returned confidently. "Ah, mademoiselle, I only wish I was so sure of a successful ending to my own search."

In my anxiety for Jacky I had forgot all about the lost little marquis, but when I stopped to think of it this quest seemed very hopeless.

"At least you have found the ring," I said, trying to hearten him as he had heartened me. "Perhaps after all your little cousin is not so far away."

"I wish I could hope so," he answered, "but, mademoiselle, your country is so vast that sometimes I cannot help having a discouragement."

"Will you know the boy, monsieur, after all these years, now that he and the ring have become separated?"

"Yes, without a doubt, mademoiselle," he answered, and would have explained further, but

at that moment Bill Schmuck came into the room with Mrs. Mummer.

"Oh!" I exclaimed delightedly, as I saw him. "You are back sooner than I expected, Bill. You must take us to Tiscoquam at once, for we have the ring again."

"I wish I could, Miss Peggy," he answered, "but the redskin has give' me the slip."

"What do you mean?" I gasped.

"He disappeared as if the ground had swallowed him up," Bill admitted, dropping his eyes from mine as if in shame at his failure.

"Then you can't take us to Tiscoquam!" I faltered, as I realized the significance of his words.

He shook his head.

On the instant all my hopes were dashed. We were then no better off than before the ring was found. From confident hope my spirits dropped to black despair as I thought of the three days poor Bee would have to endure before she could see her boy again. I could have cried then and there, but kept back my tears before M. Victor.

"How came you to lose the savage?" demanded Mrs. Mummer, turning fiercely upon Bill.

"The trail stopped in a thicket of laurels," he

explained. "At a point little more than a mile from here in a straight line on the right bank of the Wissahickon Creek. They 've a hiding-place thereabout, I 'm thinking. I followed the Indian there, easily enough. He made no move to conceal his path and I kept him in sight till he disappeared."

"And ye mean ye could n't find him again an' you so clever in the woods," cried Mrs. Mummer, much upset. "The earth did not swallow him up. You could scarce have been at pains to seek the savage—and the boy is lost!" she ended with a wail.

Mrs. Mummer was so wrought-up that she cared not upon whose head her blame fell, but her excitement calmed me, and I saw that Bill knew more than he had as yet told.

"And did you find nothing further, Bill?" I asked, with no hint of blame in my tone, for we all knew he was to be depended upon, whatever the circumstances.

"Aye, Miss Peggy, I did," he answered. "I discovered the tracks of a dozen savages, at least. The ground was thick with them up to the laurels, though there they all stopped."

"Ye could have gone into the bushes," Mrs. Mummer burst out. "Did ye fear to tear your hosen that ye halted for some bushes?"

"'T was not that brought me back," Bill went on, apparently in no way angered at Mrs. Mummer's manner toward him, "but had I gone in, a lone man among a dozen redskins, there might not have been any one to bring the news."

"You were afraid!" exclaimed Mrs. Mummer.

"Nay, Bill was quite right, Mrs. Mummer," I protested.

"I was not thinking of myself, Miss Peggy," Bill continued evenly. "They were not like to have hurt me, but they might have carried me off with the boy, keeping me with them for a few days till all chance to catch up with them would have been gone. Then they would have set me free, but it would have been too late. We must n't frighten them away, miss," he ended.

Clearly Bill Schmuck had used excellent judgment in not alarming Tiscoquam and his band, but little Jack was as far from us as ever.

"Can you not secure a strong party and surround the savages?" asked M. Victor.

"'T is what I have in mind, sir," Bill replied,

"but 't is a ticklish affair, and I 'm for waiting till Master John comes home this afternoon."

"But Jacky must be back before his mother returns," I insisted.

"I like as little as any one to have the mistress frighted for naught," Bill remarked, shaking his head, "but I dare not take a party there without another who knows the woods to head half the men. We must surround them, miss, and there 's no one here I could trust save Master John."

"I think your man is wise," agreed M. Victor. "To alarm them might be to lose all."

But I was not ready to give up. I had no wish to tell Bee her boy was gone and a plan had come into my mind.

"Bill," I said, "suppose you take M. le Vicomte and me near to the place where the laurel thicket is, and from there I will go on alone. Surely Tiscoquam and his band will not fear me."

"Nay," answered Bill, hesitatingly, "they 'll scarce run from you; but, Miss Peggy, I like not—"

"Then we will go at once," I broke in. "If there is no danger of my alarming the Indians

surely we can lose naught by the attempt, and we may gain the boy."

"Oh, but Miss Peggy, dear—" Mrs. Mummer began, looking at me with a scared face.

"Nay, naught shall stop me," I insisted positively, and I looked to M. Victor, hoping he would support me in my purpose.

"I will guarantee mademoiselle's safety," he said to Mrs. Mummer, and the matter was settled.

At Bill's suggestion we took horses, going by road the greater part of the way in order to save time. And we delayed not, but started as soon as the animals could be saddled, taking Charley, a black boy, with us, to hold them when we should take to the woods.

We broke into a quick gallop the moment we struck the road, and perhaps it was the rush of the wind and the swift ride that put so much confidence into my heart. At any rate I grew more and more certain that when I came that way again little Jack would make one of the party.

"We shall find him, monsieur," I cried to M. Victor, who rode beside me.

"Oh, to be sure," he answered. "The Fates could not be unkin' to so courageous a lady."

We came presently to the edge of the woods where we were to leave the horses while we went the rest of the way afoot.

I had doffed the save-guard skirt I had put on, and had thrown it over my saddle, so that I might the more easily climb the hillside, when I heard the clatter of several horses coming swiftly along the road toward us. As I turned to see whom it might be who traveled at such a rapid pace, I heard my name called and my heart sank like lead.

"Why, Peggy Travers! What in the world are you doing here?" I knew that voice too well to need to look. It was Bee, hurrying home as fast as she could to see her children.

CHAPTER XXIV

CROSS PURPOSES

IN a moment Bee was off her horse and we were in each other's arms.

"Oh, Peggy dear, I 've been so worried about you," she cried as she kissed me.

I clung to her in a sort of desperation, hiding my head on her shoulder and dreading the moment when she would ask if all were well at Denewood.

"It 's been a fine scare you 've given us," cried John as he dismounted. "But what on earth are you doing here at this hour of the morning?"

The moment had come when I must give the news which would wound sorely the heart of her I loved most in the world. I could not even stutter at such a time. My tongue refused to speak the words, and I could but press the closer to her. There was no way to avoid answering so simple a question, except by telling the plain truth, and that I could not do.

"Your pardon, monsieur," I heard M. Victor saying, evidently to Cousin John. "Mademoiselle Travers is good enough to aid me to fin' a little cousin that has been las' hear' of among the Indian'. We are but now looking for their hiding place."

My heart leaped with hope as I heard the young man speak. For the moment he had saved the situation. If we made it appear that it was his cousin we were seeking, Bee need have no anxiety, and I trusted Jacky would be restored to her ere she knew he was lost. In a moment I had recovered the use of my tongue and began my explanation glibly enough.

"Oh, Bee, 't is such a long and strange story that most of it must wait till we get home," I burst in. Then I introduced M. le Vicomte to her and Cousin John.

"You see, it all has to do with my mysterious ring," I went on breathlessly. "You know how Tiscoquam acted when he saw the seal?—Well, he is here again, and M. de Soulange seeks for news of the lost boy we read of in the advertisement. You remember, don't you?"

"Now I have never seen Tiscoquam since our wedding," cried Bee. "I would that I could go with you."

"Since when has your time been so engaged?" Cousin John asked with a smile.

"Ah, John, don't tease me. It seems a year already since I saw the children," Bee answered with a little blush at her own fondness.

But the suggestion that she might accompany us was a solution to at least one of my present difficulties. If she elected to go home I must go with her and give up the expedition, for I could not let her receive such news when I was not at hand. Or I must tell her at once, frankly, the real object of our quest.

"But, Bee, your babies are well," I hastened to say. "Let them wait for an hour longer and come with us. Such a chance to see the Indians in the wilds does not often fall in our way. 'T will be so different from going to buy baskets in the State House yard."

I could see that Bee wavered, but her heart was still drawing her to Denewood. M. Victor, knowing the object of this evasion of the truth,

here took her attention for a moment by adding his plea to mine, and I seized the opportunity to speak to Cousin John.

"Bring her with us, Cousin John. 'T is best for her. I will try to find a chance to explain to you," was all I could say.

But Cousin John was never one who needed to have the "i's" dotted to make out your meaning.

"Certainly we must go with this adventurous party, Bee," he said, with every appearance of but a polite interest. "We would all like to see the Indians."

Then he drew her aside and I heard him murmur: "Should Mrs. Mummer have allowed Peg to set off like this without a female attendant?"

To which Bee answered, shooting an anxious glance at me: "Oh, John, she 's but a child."

Nonetheless the matter was settled and Bee set about tucking up her riding-skirt.

Once we were in the woods it was not a difficult thing for me to have speech with Cousin John again, long enough to explain to him that it was really Jacky we were in quest of.

He was concerned, of course, but not deeply alarmed, and later on, when he had had time to

think the matter over, he came to me and said: "Your plan is the best to start with. I am confident you will get speech with Tiscoquam and if you cannot prevail upon him to give you the boy it will be time to decide what more forceful measures to take."

Had I not been so anxious that would have been a pleasant scramble over the rocks and through the trees, with the brown waters of the Wissahickon Creek below us, full to the banks now at the spring of the year.

As it was, I was glad when Bill gave the word that we were near the place where he had lost the Indian.

Bee was openly rebellious when she was told that I purposed going on alone.

"I thought we were all to see the Indians," she complained. "Moreover, I do not hold it safe for Peg to go alone. I shall go with her."

"Remember, dear, that Peg's ring gives her some sort of influence over this savage which we have not," Cousin John replied. "'T is most like that, if you go too, they will but steal away deeper into the woods and we shall catch no glimpse of them. Let her go first. I will bor-

row his moccasins from Bill, and will keep so close behind that no danger can come to her."

"I suppose there will be no real danger," Bee conceded, "but I would never let her go were it not for this poor child. I cannot forget how I felt when I thought that one of my own was at the mercy of the cruel savages."

"Nonsense! Nonsense!" laughed Cousin John, a little ill at ease. "Tiscoquam was so 'cruel' to your son that he has been teasing to go back to him ever since. Nonetheless I agree with you that no Christian child can be left to grow up among the savages, so do not try to stay Peg from her errand of mercy."

There was some further argument, but Bee was in a measure reconciled by Cousin John's plan, so M. Victor gave me the ring and I set off.

Following Bill's instructions I started north and bore up the hill, a little away from the creek. After a quarter of a mile or so I came to the thicket of laurels and thought it time to try to attract the attention of the Indians, if, as we supposed, they were in hiding somewhere thereabouts. So I lifted my voice and called "Tiscoquam! Tiscoquam!" at the top of my lungs.

It was a curious sensation, for I knew not even from which direction I might expect an answer if one were to come; indeed, now that I stood there alone in the silent forest it seemed a most hopeless undertaking. Again and yet again I called, walking about, first in one direction and then in another, and I was beginning to feel discouraged when suddenly, ahead of me in the tangled undergrowth, I caught a flash of moving color.

It was gone as quickly as it had come and I stood staring, wondering if I had but glimpsed a butterfly.

Once more I called "Tiscoquam!" looking sharply at the spot where I had seen the glint of color, and once more I distinguished a movement of something among the trees. Then, quite clearly, though but for an instant, the figure of a squaw showed in a small patch of sunlight in the midst of the thicket.

Instantly I ran toward the place and, arriving there, caught a glimpse of the figure once more, still beyond me; and so for perhaps an hundred or two hundred yards I hurried on, following the flitting shape of this Indian woman who would

appear and disappear always just a little way ahead.

Many times I called out as I ran, hoping to reassure her and perhaps induce her to stop; but she still kept well ahead, though I had no difficulty in following her.

Suddenly, however, and most unexpectedly, I ran out of the laurels into a straight wall of rock, and looked right and left for a sight of my fleeing guide. Unless she had doubled back on her own tracks there was no place of concealment, for on each side of me was the bare rock with a few evergreen trees growing close to it; but naught to afford a hiding place. Had the squaw turned, I was so close upon her heels that I felt sure I must have detected her, and yet what else could she have done to disappear so completely. She would have had need to fly to scale that wall of rock, whose bare sides offered no foothold and whose top was a good thirty feet above my head.

My first thought was to seek a way around this barrier, but as I looked I saw that this would waste my time, for it continued for fifty perch on either side of me, and I was certain the Indian woman went not that way. Either she had scaled

the rock or had turned back, and remembering Bill's talk of a hiding place I was rather inclined to the former view.

I pulled up a small plant to mark my starting-point, then went to the right, searching the face of the cliff carefully for crevices that would afford a foothold. While I was doing this I came upon two evergreens so close together that I was obliged to go around them, and, looking up, I discovered that their branches overhung the top of the cliff. In an instant I realized that here was a natural ladder that might be mounted with no great effort, and in a moment I had grasped a lower limb and started up.

I was not so old that I had lost the knack of scrambling up a tree, and though I was hampered somewhat by my petticoats, I climbed quickly, and soon swung myself upon the top of the ledge.

As I loosed my hold of the tree and turned I caught sight of a figure ere it disappeared around a jutting boulder not far from where I stood, and knew that I was upon the right track.

In a moment I was following, and as I rounded the point where I had seen the squaw vanish I

stopped suddenly, for there before me sat Tiscoquam and his band, in front of a large cave the entrance to which was shut off by a curtain made of skins.

They looked at me in silence, showing no trace upon their features of surprise, nor did they make a sign of welcome or the reverse, but sat stolidly, evidently awaiting my first words.

But I was far from feeling as indifferent. I was elated at my success in tracking them to their hiding-place and confident that I should obtain little Jack without further delay.

"I have found you, Tiscoquam!" I burst out, addressing the warrior seated in the center of the half-circle.

"The pale-face maiden could not have found Tiscoquam," he answered in a deep voice, "had Tiscoquam willed otherwise. Tiscoquam heard, and sent the squaw as guide. What message is there for Tiscoquam?"

For an instant I felt a little chagrined to think I had not been so clever as I had supposed, and that instead of following I had been led. Yet that was a matter of no moment.

"I have brought the mystic sign, Tiscoquam,

and am come for the boy," I answered, holding up the ring.

I expected the brave to stretch out his hand for it, but he seemed unimpressed and sat stolidly as if waiting for me.

"What more is it you want?" I asked at length.

"Tiscoquam waits the sign," he answered, and then I realized that it was the imprint he wished to see.

"Give me some paint and I will make the sign," I said, and at a word from their leader, one of the squaws went inside the cave and presently came forth with a gourd filled with a red paint mixed after the Indian manner.

Seeing a quiver made of white birch bark lying near the warrior, I dipped the cut stone in the red fluid and made the seal upon the parchment-like surface, while all the Indians, leaning forward, watched me with intense interest. As I straightened up they gazed at the mark and I could hear their deep breathing as if it told them something I could not guess.

"It is the sign," murmured Tiscoquam, his voice rumbling like distant thunder. "The pale-face maiden shall have the child."

Again he gave an order and I stood almost quivering with excitement, ready to take little Jacky into my arms. The moment I had been longing for had come after hours of anxiety, and I was half-way between laughing and crying as the skin curtain was drawn back and the squaw came forth leading a little boy.

It was not Jacky, but a stranger whom I had never seen before.

CHAPTER XXV

A RING WITH A RESON

SCARCE believing my eyes I looked at the boy before me. He was a slender, delicate lad, and had his hair and eyes not been light I should have said he was an Indian. He was clad in a well-worn suit of skins, fringed and beaded, like the savages about him, and he had the timid look of a frightened animal.

But though I saw at once that he was a white child he was not Jacky, and my first feeling of surprise gave place to resentment.

"Tiscoquam!" I cried angrily, "do not think to trick me! This is not the boy."

The savage showed something of astonishment at my words, then he rose to his feet and taking the lad by the shoulder led him up to me.

"Look," he grunted, drawing back the sleeves of the child's deer-skin jacket and showing me, tattooed on each forearm, a device like that cut

into the stone of my ring. "Look again," Tiscoquam commanded and pointed to the same mark upon the boy's neck between the shoulders. "It is the sign," he went on. "Tiscoquam is not two-faced. He speaks not with the forked tongue. It is the boy!"

It took me but a moment to realize the situation. I, who had been looking for little Jacky, had found the long-lost cousin of M. Victor, the little Marquis de Soulange-Caderousse. Tiscoquam and I had been at cross-purposes; for while I had thought of Jacky, he had spoken of this child and had made no agreement to give me back the one I sought.

Under other circumstances I would have rejoiced that M. Victor's quest was at an end, but I could find no joy in my heart now and thought only of how I might still recover Jacky. I was hard put to it not to cry, but I held back my tears and struggled to maintain a brave front. It would never do for me to break down and forfeit the respect of this warrior, in whose hands still lay the fate of one for whom I would gladly have bartered my own freedom.

Instead, I must match my wits against the In-

dian's and see if I could not induce him to give Jacky up.

"Tiscoquam," I said, as steadily as I could, "I see that this is indeed the boy of whom you spoke. We owe you much for his safe return, which we will gladly repay both with friendship and with gifts, if you will have it so. Will you tell me how long he has dwelt among your tribe and how he came into your hands, so that I may pass the story on to his people, who are great in their own land?"

The savage squatted again upon the ground and setting my back against the rock I awaited his pleasure.

"Six snows ago," he began, "when our hunters returned to the villages far to the North, they brought with them a man and a papoose. The man we would have beaten, but he showed us the magic sign and the marks upon the papoose's body. At this we marveled. But the man told us this child was the son of the French King, who was a mighty warrior, not like the King of the Yengees whose own people defeated him in battles. This great King had sent his son secretly to the Iroquois to show his love for them; and

with him the magic sign, so that all men might know when the appointed time had come. The sign was the sign of might and power. The Iroquois bowed to it, having their own purposes to serve."

He paused a moment, looking straight before him as if perchance he saw a vision, and I held my peace, conscious that his words had much of seriousness for the rest of his audience, though they sounded fantastic enough to my ears.

"In time this man left our village," Tiscoquam went on. "He departed secretly by night, taking with him the magic sign. This did not please the Senecas, and we followed swiftly to see if he had given us straight talk, and to note his doings. At the first white settlement he made himself simple with fire-water and boasted that he had tricked the Iroquois, vowing that the boy was not the son of the French King, but the child of his own sister. When that news reached to our lodges we would have let the boy die but for the mark. That saved him."

"Why did you fear it, Tiscoquam?" I asked, seeing naught in a figure of Cupid to so impress a savage.

"I leaned forward to do his bidding"

"Tiscoquam has no fear," he answered proudly, "but though the fool who brought the man-child spoke ever with a forked tongue, the mark *is* magic. Never was any other child so born into the world."

I could scarce conceal a start as I realized that the Indian had imagined the tattooing on the little boy to be the work of nature; but Tiscoquam was still speaking and his next words showed that the mind of the child and the mind of a savage have much in common, for what the Iroquois had thought of the mark I too had thought when I was little.

"It is a sign for the Mengive, else had it not been an Indian with a bow," Tiscoquam went on. "There have been many who have tried to read the portent, but what it means our wisest medicine men have not been able to make plain. Yet he who has the sign must have the child; so, for many moons, we have kept him till you showed the magic mark. Now the boy is restored to you."

He ended with a wave of his hand toward the young marquis, squatting like any Indian at our feet.

"And what of the Eaglet, Tiscoquam?" I asked after a pause.

"There was no bargain about the Eaglet," he answered. "The pale-face maiden knows what is in the heart of Tiscoquam. She knows that the Eaglet must come to his people and grow strong to lead the Iroquois to victory." His voice boomed and echoed among the rocks as he ceased to speak.

"But if I can read to you this riddle of the magic sign, Tiscoquam?" I answered. "If that sign has another meaning for you and for the Eaglet and for the great nation of the Iroquois, will you promise not to hold him?"

"Tiscoquam is not to be tricked by words," he answered.

"See then, Tiscoquam," I went on, putting as much of earnestness into my tone as I could; "the pale-face maiden asks no promise, but hear and judge. You wish to make of the Eaglet a leader of your people. That is well! But why was not the little boy with the three marks upon his body made your chief?"

Tiscoquam grunted in derision.

"The name we gave him is Timid-Fawn, a

squaw's name," he answered, and by that I saw that if the thought of making the boy a chief had ever entered the Indian's mind, the lad's own disposition had put an end to it.

"Nevertheless, Tiscoquam, bravery is not all that is needed," I said. "There are no braver men than the Senecas themselves. More is required than courage, as the three marks upon the child proclaim."

"What of the marks?" he asked, displaying an interest that must have been intense, else had he shown naught of his feelings.

"The first is upon the left hand, Tiscoquam," I told him, "and that is a sign for this child himself, who uses that hand before the other."

I had noted this fact when the lad had come up to me, and Tiscoquam grunted in acquiescence.

"This boy is in truth French, although he is not the son of their king," I continued, scarce knowing, now that I had begun, where I should end my explanation. "He must be returned to his people to make them friends with the Iroquois and so be as useful to them both as is the left hand to the body."

For a moment I paused.

"The right hand stands for the Eaglet. It is he who must unite the Iroquois and make them once again a strong nation and brothers to the pale-faces in this land, even as the right hand holds firmly the hand of a friend."

"Then should the Iroquois keep him safe," Tiscoquam murmured, with slow and satisfied up and down nods of his head.

"Nay, wait till I have finished," I continued, holding up my hand for silence. "The Iroquois nation is as the body marked by the sign, but the head is the great American nation and it is the head which bears no mark. So is it without a master, and the spirit of the sign has no power over it. Of what use, Tiscoquam, are the hands and the body if they are not guided by the head? Is it not plain that the Eaglet must stay with his pale-faced people to learn those things which make them mighty? Are the pale-faces stronger than the Iroquois? No! Are they braver than the Iroquois? No! But in the head of the pale-face is more wisdom than in the head of the Iroquois. It is because they know things that the Iroquois have not yet learned that they conquer. How then, Tiscoquam, will the Eaglet learn the

things they know not if he stays with his red brothers? He will be no more than many brave men of the Six Nations. What can Tiscoquam teach him to arm him with power that will stay the dwindling of your hunting-grounds as the years go by? He must have the wisdom of both red men and white, and it will be the Indian's loss if they rob him of his birthright. Remember the magic sign on the other child speaks not of one but of two boys, so both must come with me."

I paused, not knowing what more to say, and looked at Tiscoquam anxiously, hoping for some hint that I had impressed him, but his stolid countenance showed naught that I could read.

"Go!" he cried suddenly, and taking up his blanket he covered his face.

I gazed at the formless, huddled figure, trying to hit upon some way to move the man, but I had already done my best. Cousin John must now act.

There was naught left for me to do but to go as the rude savage commanded. I had failed in my mission and now must return to break the news that could no longer be kept from Bee.

With a heavy heart I took the little French boy's hand and together we went by the path a-top the ledge of rock, the Indians paying no more heed to us than they did to the birds.

When we came to the tree up which I had clambered I hesitated, for going down seemed a much more perilous undertaking, but the boy, quick to note my timidity, gave me an encouraging smile and pointed out an easier manner to descend, leading the way like a squirrel.

I had no mind to hurry my return, being busy with the sad news I must tell, but we came upon the grassy glade where I had left our little party all too quickly.

I paused at the edge of the trees, dreading to go on. There was dear Bee plucking flowers, all unconscious of the pain in store for her, while M. Victor chatted gaily in his funny, clipped English. Cousin John and Bill Schmuck I saw not, and wondered if they still followed me.

The two had their backs to me, and I went toward them slowly without their being aware of our presence. Then a snapping twig drew their attention to us.

Bee looked up at me with a loving smile upon

her lips, and as her eye caught sight of the boy at my side she broke into a happy laugh.

"Ha! Ha! Peggy has found the boy!" she cried, but M. Victor, knowing that this child was not the one I had been seeking, gazed at me with much concern.

"Mademoiselle," he began solicitously, but I checked him with a gesture.

"'T is the little Marquis de Soulange-Caderousse," I announced, holding out the lad's hand to him.

"The little marquis!" he repeated in amazement. "C'est impossible."

"It is indeed he, monsieur," I insisted, and pulling up the sleeve of the skin jacket I showed the mark upon the right arm.

M. Victor examined the tattooed device for an instant in amazement, then with quick movements he sought and found the other signs.

"Mademoiselle," he said feelingly, "you have indeed brought to me him who I have hunt' for so long. I shall ever be in your debt; but, mademoiselle—"

He stopped, seeing the anxiety in my face as I turned my eyes to Bee.

"What is it, Peggy dear?" she exclaimed, coming quickly to me. "What has happened?"

The moment I had been dreading had come.

"Oh, Bee," I began, putting my arms around her neck, but ere another word was spoken there came an interruption.

"Tiscoquam brings greeting to the pale faces!" boomed the voice of the chief, and we turned to find the entire band standing stiffly in a group at the edge of the forest. How they had arrived without our hearing them astonished us all. It was like magic, for they had appeared as silently as if they had sprung up from the ground.

"Tiscoquam has come to pow-wow with the young Eagle," the tall brave went on after a moment, addressing no one in particular. For an instant we stood regarding him, then our attention was caught by the sound of some one crashing through the woods and Cousin John burst into the circle, followed by Bill Schmuck.

"Now have I been tricked," he cried, striding up to Tiscoquam. "Where have you taken her?"

"Let not my brother be hasty," answered Tiscoquam. "The pale-face maid is safe, and between brothers there should be no hot words."

"I 'm here, Cousin John," I called, going toward him.

"But where is the boy?" he demanded, his eye passing over the lad at M. Victor's side.

"Do you not see him?" cried Bee. "Where are your eyes?"

"It is the other boy I want, Tiscoquam," said Cousin John, turning on the Indian. "Where is he? for I mean to have him ere we part."

Tiscoquam gave him glance for glance, and for an instant the two stood eying each other sternly.

"Tiscoquam does not speak with the forked tongue," the Indian declared proudly. "He told the pale-face maiden that the Eaglet was with his own people."

With a gesture he now indicated the group of whites who upon his advent had drawn somewhat together.

Then, as Cousin John would have interrupted violently, he held up a warning hand.

"To-day Tiscoquam has come to understanding. He has listened to a young maiden speaking words of wisdom like a chief grown old in the councils. From her he has learned that the greatest strength is not that of the thews and sin-

ews. For the strength of the pale face is in his wisdom and it is by means of it this maid has conquered Tiscoquam. The Eaglet is hers. 'T is from her you must ask him."

"The Eaglet—" said Bee, clasping her hands nervously, "the Eaglet—is not that my Jacky?"

"Tiscoquam," I cried, unable to bear the blow he was making me inflict on the one I loved most dearly, "if the boy is mine 't is you who must give him to me, for I know not where he is."

At this appeal a shade of satisfaction seemed to creep over the warrior's face.

"The Indian too has a wisdom of his own that is not altogether to be despised," he said. "The Eaglet is on his way here even now, oh, pale-face maiden with the spirit of a warrior."

As he spoke he pointed down stream, and we waited a long moment seeing nothing. Then, coming toward us, we made out Mark Powell, accompanied by Jacky, and led by an Indian whom Tiscoquam had evidently despatched to meet them some time before.

The boy, on catching sight of the party, broke into a run and bursting in upon us, threw himself upon me.

"I am *not* a bad boy, Aunty Peg," he protested aggrievedly. "Mrs. Mummer said, 'spare the rod,' and sent us forth to find you, but I am not naughty. My Dada told me to take care always of my mover and sister; so, when Clarinda runned away, I did not want Marjory to be frighted too, and ran to tell her Tiscoquam was a good Indian."

"And have you been at home all this morning?" I asked, kneeling and putting my arms about him.

"Yes," he answered quite gravely, "in the summer-house with Marjory and Sally and Easter. They 're but women and Dada says a man—" Here he broke off, looking up and seeing his mother for the first time. With a cry of surprised delight he ran to her, and she drew him close.

"Oh, Peggy," she murmured, "you thought he was lost, too," and in her face I seemed to see the surprise, the knowledge, the pain and the relief that swept over her by turns.

"And now, young Eagle," said Tiscoquam, his voice echoing through the forest as he lifted his eyes from the sight of Bee clasping her boy in

her arms, "Tiscoquam has words for your ear, ere he turns his face toward his own hunting-ground." He hesitated for a moment as if to choose his language with due care, then went on, "Tiscoquam planned to make the Eaglet a great Sachem after his own fashion and the fashion of his people, but that is not to be. The pale-face maiden has shown that more is needed than Tiscoquam can give; yet that has not changed the heart of the Mengive. Still is the Eaglet dear to Tiscoquam. Still will he and his people teach the Eaglet all they know when the young Eagle says the time is ripe. And there is something they can teach, as was shown but now!"

He turned as if he had said all and would go.

Cousin John made a gesture to stay him, but at that moment little Jacky extricated himself from his mother's arms and flung himself upon the Seneca.

"Oh, Mover!" he cried, "here is my friend. He is such a nice Indian!"

The effect was magical.

Tiscoquam took the boy up and set him upon his shoulder.

"Ho!" he said. "'T is thus Tiscoquam and the Eaglet will go together to hunt the deer."

Jacky shouted with delight at this promise, and his father went up to Tiscoquam and held out his hand.

"Brother," he said, "the woods of Denewood are yours. Whenever you camp there the Eaglet will welcome you. You shall teach him all the lore of the forest, and if you will have me of your party we will all three hunt the deer together."

It was handsomely done and the Indian was quick to sense that all mistrust of him had melted away.

"Good!" he ejaculated, standing very straight and looking proudly at Cousin John. "Good! If all the pale-face peoples were as the young Eagle then indeed might the Iroquois cease to be a nation and become the brothers of their conquerors."

The whole band escorted us back to our horses with right good will on both sides; but even so, I could scarce believe my ears when I heard Bee say to Cousin John:

"When Tiscoquam comes to take Jacky hunting I don't see why you should trouble to go with them, Jack dear."

Her husband, as surprised as I, exclaimed:

"I but made the offer to relieve your mind."

"Oh," returned Bee, as if the idea of alarm on Jacky's account were quite out of the question, "I can trust him anywhere with Tiscoquam. Can't you see he loves the boy?"

I chuckled a little at this, and M. le Vicomte, who rode beside me with the young marquis on his saddle-bow, was also interested.

"Is it that you think the savage is not to be trus'?" he asked me.

"Nay," I replied, "he will guard the boy with his life. I but wondered what Mrs. Mummer would think of the arrangement."

"Ha! ha!" exclaimed M. Victor. "Now I, too, see the joke."

"And now your quest is over," I said, indicating the silent boy in front of him, "you will go home, taking health and happiness to your father. He will be very proud of your success."

"Ah, mademoiselle," he laughed, "now you make fon of a poor Frenchman. 'T is you who

have found the lost marquis and—" he went on more soberly, "it will be most difficult that I express my thanks to you in my clumsy English."

"Nay, do not think of that, monsieur," I hastened to interrupt; "remember you saved me from that beating." Then, to change the subject, for I wanted not that he should embarrass me with his gratitude, "Here is your ring again," I said, stripping it off my finger and handing it to him, not, I confess, without a pang of regret at parting with it.

He looked at it thoughtfully for a moment ere he spoke.

"There are those who say it is the work of Benvenuto Cellini," he remarked, "the great goldsmith, you know. But, now that I see it, I am not of that opinion. This is rougher, bolder work and lack' his delicate invention. No, it is not Cellini— Nor, can I feel that the ring belongs to me."

"What do you mean?" I asked him. "Did you not say your cousin had left it to you?"

"He did. He did," M. Victor answered, "but I have not earn' it. But for you, who knows if I ever would have foun' this little fellow here?"

And his arm tightened about the slight figure in front of him, while the lad looked up with a smile, glad to have fallen among friends at last.

"But you would have found him, monsieur," I said, positively. "You would never have given up until you had."

"I am proud of your confidence." M. Victor's tone was very sincere. "I hope I may always be worthy of it. Yet, mademoiselle, I am going to beg the favor that you give me not back the ring until I come again."

I was too astonished to speak, but he went on quickly:

"When I am gone to France, where I must go at once, for my father's sake, I should like to leave the ring with you, because of the reson that you have not yet see'."

"Oh, yes," I exclaimed. "You said you would tell me about it."

"Look then, mademoiselle," he replied, and holding the ring toward me he pressed one of the bosses beside the great sapphire and the bezel holding it sprang up like the lid of a box. Then he handed it to me, open.

"Read, mademoiselle," he begged. "It is old French. Can you onderstan' it?"

Inside, under the cut stone, I saw a line of Gothic characters, small but very clearly engraved, and I read them half-aloud. "Je sui ici en li'v d'ami."

"I am afraid I cannot make it out, monsieur," I said, for though the words seemed familiar enough, they were not quite right to my thinking, and I liked not to make a mistake.

"In English, mademoiselle," he replied, "it would read like this: 'I am here in place of a frien'.' Will you not hold the ring and let the reson remin' you of one who will ever be thinking of you?"

I know not why I should have stuttered as I replied:

"I s-s-should l-like to k-keep it, monsieur, if B-Bee s-s-says I m-m-may."

And so we fared on to Denewood.

THE END